

**US-CHINA RIVALRY IN POST-OBAMA PERIOD:
GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN**



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SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "US-China Rivalry in Post-Obama Period: Geopolitical Implications for Pakistan" is the original work submitted by Ms.Haleema Sadia, a student of MS in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences. This research work has been successfully done under my guidance and supervision. She has fulfilled all the requirements for the award for the MS degree ordinance at the University. This is important to certify that this thesis has not been submitted for attainment of any Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, or Fellowship from any other university.

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that this thesis entitled "US-CHINA RIVALRY IN POST-OBAMA PERIOD: GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN" is my original work. This research work was completed under the supervision of Dr. Noor Fatima and submitted to the Department of International Relations as satisfying the requirements for the degree of master's in international relations. I have properly referenced and cited the sources of information in my thesis. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AUKUS	Australia, United kingdom, United State
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa,
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
IMF	International Monetary Fund
I2U2	India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States
PM	Prime Minister
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SIFC	Special Investment Facilitation Council
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization
NDB	National Development Bank
B3W	Build Back Better World
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
IR	International Relations
LCD	Liquid Crystal Display

PLA-N	People Liberation Army Navy
MIC 2025	Made in China 2025
ZTE	Hong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Limited
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement on Geospatial Cooperation
SLOC	Sea lines of communication
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
CARs	Central Asian Republics
IIOJK	Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
EU	European Union
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
UAE	United Arab Emirates
RCD	Regional Cooperation for Development
NACTA	National Counter Terrorism Authority
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization

ABSTRACT

This research thesis delves into escalating US-China rivalry in the post-Obama period, with an emphasis on the trade war as its core aspect. The World is going through major transformations: the rise of China threatening U.S. global hegemony and supremacy, and shift of geopolitics towards Asia. Such changing global dynamics pose profound challenges for states within influence of great powers driven by their geopolitical interests. Pakistan, in South Asia, is directly impacted by the on-going great power competition. This study analyses the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst evolving US-China competition. It explores strategies that Pakistan can adopt to effectively balance its relations with both the U.S and China. This research employs an exploratory qualitative research methodology. Primary source such as official government documents and secondary data from sources such as books, research articles, research papers, think tank articles, journals, news articles. This study employs the theory of offensive realism and the concept of strategic hegemony under its conceptual framework. The U.S.-China trade disparity, high-tech war, unfair trade practices, technological and economic dominance, intellectual property right violations, and undermining international standing for each other are contributing factor behind the rising trade war. In this backdrop, Pakistan faces challenges based on security due to U.S.-India cooperation, Indo-Pacific alliances, the Afghanistan situation and economic challenges in the form of CPEC, trade war impacts on Pakistan, and domestic economic and political stability. The objective of the study is to analyse the security and economic challenges Pakistan faces due to the U.S.-China rivalry and to explore strategies for maintaining a balanced relationship with both powers, ensuring the protection of its national interests.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Great powers aim to achieve political and strategic goals by exerting influence and controlling the world's geography. More powers are rising to gain power and ensure their interests. Domains of competition and cooperation are broadening. World has become highly integrated due to interdependence by means of technology, information flows, capital flows, and people. Countries ensure their strategic benefits through cooperation on common challenges such as technological, environmental, and economic issues. States are increasingly reliant on their neighboring countries and the global community to maximize their national interests (Small, 2020).

Pakistan, a geographically important country with four important regional neighbouring countries- China to its North, Afghanistan to its west, India as its eastern neighbour, and Iran to the southwest- has a pivotal location at the juncture of Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia, making it a crucial player in the changing geopolitics around the globe. As a significant player in regional politics, Pakistan seeks to enhance and improve its relations with great powers such as U.S., China, Russia and other rising countries. To achieve this, it is necessary to gain political and economic stability (Zaheer, 2023).

During the Cold War era, the U.S. termed Pakistan as an important strategic asset that cannot be marginalized. However, this alliance between U.S. and Pakistan wasn't a bona fide partnership. Instead, it was driven by the U.S.'s intent to counter and contain the USSR, and Pakistan's need to receive economic aid and counterbalance India. "Pakistan is always pivotal to U.S interests in South Asian region and progressive interaction is crucial and significant for probing and managing in cross border terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Amicable relations with Pakistan is also crucial in managing restrain in the south Asian region for nuclear proliferation of both India and Pakistan .US found India a strategic partner in the region including its security concerns.. After the cold war Pakistan was impelled to join U. S for its role of frontline state in war on terror" (Baloch, Memon, Hakro, 2014).

It was a test for Pakistan to appear as the U.S.'s front line ally to the fullest. But now, after withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the superpower has shown a cold shoulder to Pakistan, with modified Indo-Pacific approach that terms India as a net security provider. Pakistan U.S. can be characterized as an anecdote of aggrandized expectations, misunderstanding, and broken promises (McMahon, 2014).

The evolving U.S.-India relations and the remarkable rise of ambitious China have made Pakistan an important partner to accomplish China's economic goals. In 2013, President Xi initiated a massive investment and infrastructure project, Belt and Road Initiative. One of the important flagship projects, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is essential to fulfil China's vision. Worth \$70 Billion, it includes special economic zones, energy, infrastructure and the development of Gwadar Port. The success of CPEC is crucial for the success of BRI. CPEC will lead to an economic and strategic connection between Pakistan and southwest China. "The bond of friendship and mutual assistance between the Chinese and Pakistani people is stronger than gold, and the two countries' iron-clad friendship is deeply rooted in the people and boasts strong vitality" said by the spokesperson at MFA press conference (Miller, 2022). In the context of the U.S.-China rivalry, this connection holds substantial geopolitical implications for Pakistan. As China deepens its economic and strategic ties with Pakistan through CPEC, the U.S. perceives this growing influence as a challenge to its interests in the region. Consequently, Pakistan finds itself navigating a complex landscape of geopolitical tensions, where it must balance its relationship with both major powers to safeguard its national interests and maintain regional stability.

Geographically, Pakistan is in a challenging regional location. Pakistan's geographical regional location, tormented by political instability, with internationally isolated Afghanistan and Iran on its Western border and India as its hostile neighbor, makes it difficult and challenging to ensure the strengthening of its position. In order to strengthen its position in this turbulent environment, Pakistan must focus on ensuring internal stability, achieving developmental goals, and promoting peace in the region (Pakistan in the New Geopolitics of Asia, 2023). The challenges of 21st century appear to be complex and tough. Only politically and economically stable countries can survive and compete in this uncertain international environment. The uncertainty in the international environment is largely due to the escalating U.S.-China competition. This rivalry introduces unpredictability in global politics, economics, and security. For countries like Pakistan, situated in a geopolitically sensitive region with political instability and challenging neighbors, this uncertainty makes it even more difficult to navigate and strengthen their position.

The unprecedented ascent of People's Republic of China's is sparking debates in international relations. Different IR scholars are interpreting China's rise differently. For some academics, it is peaceful, which will contribute towards world economy in a positive way. Since the late 1970s, China's national income has annually increased by 9.7% due to

market oriented reforms. But some scholars are considering its rise not peaceful rather threatening. As realists consider, a rising power might exploit the anarchic and uncertain international environment. China is building its economic power to strengthen its military might, leading to projecting dominance (Whyte, 2013).

The intense competition between the U.S. and China possesses aspects of neo-Cold War. Economic rivalry, as the core aspect of this emerging competition, has the U.S. and China asserting dominance marked by harsh trade practices, such as strict tariffs on imports, intellectual property right violations concerns, technology transfer, and disruption strategy. This economic rivalry also coincides with technological supremacy in areas like 5G technology, semiconductor production, and artificial intelligence resulting in restrictions and bans on each other's technology investments and exports. Both great powers are fiercely competing in this domain to gain dominance (Whyte, 2013). It becomes crucial to focus on increasing U.S.-China competition considering the already troubled security of South Asia. The U.S. has sought strong relations with India, whereas Pakistan has become a close partner with China. The U.S.-China competition is rapidly escalating with U.S. strongly opposing the China rise in various domains; this has caused an especially uncertain and unstable situation for Pakistan. Transforming global and regional geopolitics, Pakistan faces multiple economic and security challenges. The stable and rational approach for Pakistan in such a precarious situation is not to place all its eggs in the basket of either global power (Ali, 2020).

Strategic hedging is the optimistic key by which Pakistan can strengthen its international and regional position and ensure its national interest. This study employs John Mearsheimer theory of offensive realism to explore the trade war as a core aspect of U.S.-China rivalry. The study utilizes the concept of strategic hedging to develop strategies that Pakistan can adopt in maintaining a delicate balance in the evolving great powers' struggle.

This study addresses the fundamental questions: what are the pivotal factors contributing to the intensification of the evolving US-China rivalry in the Post-Obama period? What are the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst the evolving US-China competition? How can Pakistan adeptly navigate its relations with both the US and China through effective strategies?

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The contemporary global landscape is marked by an intensifying US-China rivalry, with the trade war at its core, and the emergence of strategic alliances like QUAD, AUKUS, and BRICS. The rise of China, exemplified by its One Belt and Road Initiative (OBRI), has drawn significant scrutiny, particularly as the Indo-Pacific region becomes central to great power politics. Within this context, US-India cooperation is strengthening, reflecting their mutual interest in counterbalancing China's influence. Simultaneously, the situation in Afghanistan remains complex, influencing regional stability. Small states like Pakistan, with its strategic geopolitical position, are particularly vulnerable to the security and economic challenges posed by these dynamics. To navigate the pressures from the US-China rivalry and secure its national interests, Pakistan must employ effective strategies that consider the evolving power structures and regional alliances.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Significant transformations across the international stage, propelled fundamentally by the exceptional rise of China, the heightening rivalry between the great powers, the United States and China, and the shift of geopolitics towards Asia, are modifying the hegemonic dynamics globally. The U.S.-China relationship is characterized by a mix of conflict and cooperation, spanning economic, political, and strategic dimensions. The trade war is a substantial aspect of their geopolitical rivalry, marked by opposing economic interests and technological dominance. Increasing U.S.-India cooperation and the complicated situation in Afghanistan further intensify the challenges for small states like Pakistan. As a South Asian state, Pakistan encounters profound hurdles as it seeks to plot an effective trajectory amid the emerging great power competition. The research focuses on identifying and analysing the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst the evolving U.S.-China competition. Moreover, it seeks to explore strategies that Pakistan can adopt to effectively balance its relations with both the U.S. and China. This study has three objectives: To examine the pivotal factors behind the intensifying U.S.-China competition, with the trade war as crucial aspect of their escalating rivalry, to analyse Pakistan's economic and security challenges that it must encounter, and lastly to explore the adoption of effective strategies by Pakistan for maintaining a delicate balance and leveraging the rising great power competition.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study, “US-China Rivalry in Post-Obama Period: Geopolitical Implications for Pakistan”, can be considered significant for multiple reasons. The study addresses the 21st-century emerging global power rivalry, occurring between the United States, and the rising China. Understanding and studying the globally changing geopolitics based on two powerful rivals is beneficial for scholars, policymakers, and International Relations students. Readers will be able to connect isolated events and comprehend the emerging phenomenon. This research study adds valuable literature to the field of international relations.

The study provides new interpretations and perspectives regarding evolving global politics. As this study emphasizes security and economic challenges, readers will become more aware of the geopolitical challenges set forth by the escalating superpowers’ competition. This helps Pakistan’s policymakers to effectively explore and employ strategies in order to balance the country’s relations with the U.S. and China. Its crucial time for our country’s policy makers to determine an effective trajectory that serves Pakistan’s interests in the era of changing global dynamics and geopolitics.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The research is based on the following objectives:

1. To examine the pivotal factors contributing to the intensification of the evolving US-China rivalry in the Post-Obama period
2. To analyse the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst the evolving US-China competition
3. To explore effective strategies Pakistan can adopt to adeptly navigate its relations with both the U.S. and China.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the pivotal factors contributing to the intensification of the evolving US-China rivalry in the Post-Obama period?
2. What are the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst the evolving US-China competition?
3. How can Pakistan adeptly navigate its relations with both the US and China through effective strategies?

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study is limited by the availability of time, funding, and data sources. It specifically focuses on aspects of the U.S.-China rivalry, including the trade war, the security impacts of U.S.-India cooperation, Indo-Pacific alliances, and the situation in Afghanistan, particularly in relation to Pakistan. Given these constraints, it is not possible to cover every aspect in detail.

1.7 Literature Review

"Pakistan in the New Geopolitics of Asia," an article published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, discusses transforming global and regional dynamic which poses many challenges for geographically important country like Pakistan. It emphasizes understanding such transformations considering Pakistan's location at the juncture of Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia. The writer addresses geopolitical challenges such as Pakistan's borders with risky neighbors, Afghanistan, Iran, and hostile India. The intensifying U.S.-China relations further create a fraught security situation for Pakistan, with increasing U.S.-India cooperation and China's massive economic project, BRI's success depending on flagship project, CPEC. In such an evolving geopolitics, Pakistan must encounter challenges through effective strategies to leverage from this intensifying environment (Small, 2020).

Touqir Hussain's article, titled "US-China Rivalry." published in Dawn News, provides insights into the widely discussed emerging issue of U.S.–China rivalry. This article briefly mentions the implications of this rivalry for Pakistan. Touqir Hussain contrasts the U.S-China antagonistic relations with US.-USSR relations during the Cold War. He points out the difference between both rivalries. Russia was an adversary for U.S., while China is a rival. The Cold War main aspects were ideological differences and military contentions, whereas the US-China rivalry's main elements are economic and technological competition, regional influence, and global standing. Hussain highlights China as rising economic power, unlike USSR. This article explains the factors behind the U.S.-China rivalry. Geopolitical alliances such as the QUAD and AUKUS are deterrents against China's rising dominance. The world order is in transition, where not only is U.S.-China competition escalating, but Russia assertiveness is also rising. Europe has aspirations for autonomy and also ambitious middle powers are emerging. Pakistan's partnership with China is essential for its geopolitical interests but it should avoid solely relying on China. Instead, Pakistan needs the U.S. as an

important bilateral partner for economic support. Pakistan must attain internal strength to strengthen its position in the changing regional power dynamics (Hussain, 2023).

Andrew Small, in his book “The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics”, scrutinizes the China-Pakistan relations’ complexities and their significance in the evolving global and regional politics. This book underscores various elements of this partnership, encompassing economic and military cooperation. Andrew addresses the implications of CPEC, the flagship project of BRI. The emerging global power rivalry impacts the strategic interests of Pakistan and its relations with both the US and China. Pakistan and China's military cooperation which includes joint exercise, arms sales, and intelligence sharing, combats security challenges for Pakistan, strengthening its security position in South Asia.. The book discusses military and security cooperation between China and Pakistan, including arms sales, joint exercises, and intelligence-sharing. It addresses the role of this cooperation in addressing common security challenges. The book gives insights into how the Pakistan China partnership impacts China's sway in the Indian Ocean and beyond. It also discusses the repercussions of the all-weather friendship on India, Afghanistan, the West and the whole Asia. China's biggest danger is the Islamic militancy threat to its internal stability, and Beijing’s dilemma is in carrying out strategic rivalry with the USA and India (Small, 2015).

John Mearsheimer, in his paper, "The Inevitable Rivalry: America, China, and the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics," comprehends the global great power dynamics with special emphasis on the U.S.-China rivalry. He underscores that security dilemmas, power dynamics, and interests shape states’ behaviour. The Pursuit of security, survival and power leads inevitably to a ‘tragedy‘ conflict and competition in an anarchic international system. Mearsheimer explicated this ‘tragedy’ concept through historical examples. He frames U.S.-China rivalry within the concept of tragedy, leading ultimately to conflict. Both great powers have divergent interests based on technological, economic and military dominance. Competition and mistrust will continue to persist. However, there are areas where both can cooperate, such as climate change and other global issues. The current U.S.-China relations indicate start of a new Cold War. The U.S. may impede China’s rise as a strategic move, considering China’s potential to become a rival in Asia and other regions. Mearsheimer brings an insightful contribution to understanding the changing global dynamics and great power politics (Mearsheimer, 2021).

The article "The U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry and its Implications for Pakistan" is written by Syed Mohammad Ali, in which the complex, changing global dynamics driven primarily by the intense U.S-China competition are described. The U.S. is increasing cooperation and security ties with India to counter China. The China-Pakistan all-weather friendship has strengthened even more due to the CPEC, the flagship project of BRI. Moreover, strong military cooperation too exists. This situation is precarious for Pakistan to pursue and ensure its national interests in such a complex environment. Ali discusses the economic, military and regional implications of the emerging great power competition for Pakistan. Pakistan's perspective on this growing uncertainty has been described through drawing insights from interviews, public statements, and research. Ali stresses that Pakistan should keep its options open to effectively navigate the great power rivalry. It must play its role to abate the risks arising from the U.S.-China rivalry (Ali, 2020).

"The Battle for Pakistan: The Bitter US Friendship and a Tough Neighbourhood" is a book written by Shuja, providing in-depth insights and analysis of Pakistan-U.S. relationship trajectory. These books mentions how the Cold War and the War on Terror post 9/11 have influence both states' relations. Shuja also underscores the internal and external challenges for Pakistan. Various political, strategic and historical dimensions have formed the basis of U.S.-Pakistan relations. The writer emphasizes the geopolitical importance of Pakistan due to its location in the South Asian region, and the U.S. foreign policy approach towards Pakistan is shaped by this geographical factor. Pakistan faces many challenges due to its neighbors, unstable economic condition, and political instability. Pakistan's objective in joining the U.S. camp during the Cold War was to attain economic aid and military assistance. Shuja argues that the U.S. foreign policy approach has been based on short-term gains rather than a genuine long-term partnership. He highlights strategic importance in relation to regional stability, its role in Afghanistan, and its relationships, and provides recommendations. Pakistan must address the root causes of its instability and achieve its development goals (Nawaz, 2019).

The book "Tragedy of Great Power Politics" is written by a renowned international relations scholar and political scientist. This book delves into international relations dynamics and provides a new lens through which to view international relations and great power competition, in the form of the theory of offensive realism. According to him, the international system is anarchic, causing a power struggle and security dilemma among

states. Great powers seek power maximization to sustain their dominance and counter the opposing powers threatening their hegemony. He has specifically provided insight into the present U.S.- China rivalry and growing competition. Undoubtedly, his work is considered influential, providing a better understanding of international relations, the nature, and behavior of states in an anarchic international system (Mearsheimer, 2001).

This book, "The Great Decoupling China, America and the Struggle for Technological Supremacy", provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the dynamics of increasing U.S.-China technology war. The book puts forth the implications of the decoupling of relations between great powers' rivalry for the global economy, security, and balance of power. Both powers are seeking dominance in technological areas such as 5G networks, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. This rivalry is driven by many factors, including national security concerns, trade disputes, and technological advancement. China had to go through a long struggle as it missed the Industrial Revolution. In late 1980s, China made economic reforms and became the world's second largest economy, sparking a rise that has threatened U.S. dominance. Technological areas such as cyberspace and artificial intelligence have become battleground to seek dominance. The growing competition between the two countries can result in their technology decoupling, shaping 21st century geopolitics and repercussions for the future of humanity (Reghunadhan, 2021).

"Introducing International Relations Concepts, Theories, and Practices" written by Farhan Hanif Siddiqi and Muhammad Nadeem Mirza seeks to explicate the fundamental concepts of the International relations discipline. The book aims to ease students's understanding of International Relations. It clarifies basic concepts such as states, nation-states, sovereignty, government, and non-state actors. Different international relations perspectives, including liberal internationalism, structural realism, post-positivism theories, complex interdependence, Marxism, and the English school, are presented. The authors have addressed issues of international politics, such as security, globalization, conflict resolution, human rights, climate change and the global economy. They have adopted a pedagogical approach incorporating different historical and present-day case studies, a questioning approach, and discussion to provoke critical thinking among readers. Importantly, this book sheds light on international relations today and tomorrow (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2023).

"Structural incentives and Chinese Diplomacy toward the Neighbouring States" written by Xiaoting Li analyses the rise of China through the offensive realism perspective.

The writer assesses the China's behaviour and strategy in dealing with its neighbors. According to offensive realism, when a rising power is unable to fully dominate its region, that state adopts a carrot and sticks strategy with neighboring states and prevents external powers' influence within their vicinity. China's behaviour with territorial disputes harmonizes with the mentioned theoretical approach. China's assertiveness and restraint are foreign policy strategies to counteract adversaries projecting influence within China's vicinity of influence (Li, 2015).

The researcher's paper, titled "Asia-Pacific under Obama's Rebalance Strategy: Regional Responses by Syed Tanveer Ali Shah, Dr. Muhammad Muzaffar, and Sidra Karamat, analyses the rebalance strategy of the Obama Administration towards the Asia-Pacific. This strategy is based on these elements: economic, security, and diplomacy. U.S. intended to exert a strong influence over the regions of South Asia and Southeast Asia. However, China considered this rebalance strategy as a Cold War style containment of China. Therefore, it responded with both hard and soft power. The U.S. pronounces the rising China as contentious in the Asia Pacific. The evolving geopolitical transformations can be understood through Power Transition Theory (Shah, Muzaffar, & Karamat, 2020).

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Pakistan's Foreign Policy: The Hedging Option" by Farhan Hanif Siddiqi underscores the effectiveness of hedging strategy for Pakistan in intensifying U.S.-China rivalry and changing global dynamics. Pakistan faces a dilemma under emerging uncertain circumstances, as its interests are strongly linked to both the U.S. and China. Strategic hedging is based on policies that advocate a risk minimization and benefit maximization approach to circumvent the great power rivalry impacts. It necessary for Pakistan to avoid choosing sides and develop balance relations with both great powers (Siddiqi, 2022).

In this paper, "CPEC – Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics", Muhammad Tahir Rasheed , Uzma Ashiq, and Nargis Mirza Abbas emphasize the significant flagship multi-billion dollar project, CPEC aimed at infrastructure development, special economic zones, investments, and technical expertise sharing in Pakistan. This project is ambitious aspiration to achieve economic dominance in Eurasia and Africa. Pakistan must take advantage of this opportunity to stabilize its stumbling economic growth. Now, Pakistan's policy makers must devise plans to utilize the valuable human resources such as the country's youth, who can play effective role in nation's building and welfare. This paper mentions controversies regarding CPEC, as

it is said that this project will exploit Pakistan's economy. CPEC must be analyzed, as it possesses geopolitical implications for the region (Rashid et al., 2022).

In this article titled "How China and Pakistan Forged Close Ties" by Manjari Chatterjee Miller, it is highlighted how Pakistan and China forged relations. After Sino-India 1962 conflict, Pakistan ceded Shaksgam Valley to China. India became a strategic concern for both countries. However, China still didn't fully trust and fully embrace relations with Pakistan as China was worried about Pakistan's militancy image. Nevertheless, in the 21st century, their relationship became stronger than ever before. China started considering Pakistan as an important partner in changing geopolitics. The U.S. increased cooperation with India to counter rising China. In order to rise as an economic power, China started massive project BRI, in 2013. One of its important projects, the CPEC, aims for infrastructure development, investments in energy sector, and increasing job opportunities. This made Pakistan an important partner for China. They consider each other as all-weather friends (Miller, 2022).

This Nikki Asia news article, "Chinese tech companies topple Japan, chase US in market share", talks about the unprecedented advancement of Chinese high-tech companies. Chinese companies are outpacing technologically developed states such as Japan and are in competition with U.S. technological advancements. Chinese companies are gaining progress in various high-tech areas such as smartphones, LCD panels, and personal computers. Despite trade contentions with the U.S., the gap in market share has been reduced due to extensive competitiveness. China's smartphone company, Huawei, has progressed extraordinarily, becoming the world's top smartphone production company. U.S. sanctions can still pose threats and challenges for China technological dominance (Chinese tech companies topple Japan, 2020).

1.8 Research Gap

Considering global transformations, it becomes necessary for a geopolitically important country like Pakistan to decide and direct its pathway in the emerging great power dynamics. While considerable research work has been done related to global power competition, there exist a notable gap regarding the options and strategies that Pakistan must employ to leverage this emerging competition. There is a need to thoroughly present and address the security and economic challenges encountered by Pakistan. There's a need to

address and shift focus towards concept of strategic hegemony which seems to be an effective strategy in case of Pakistan. In-depth literature encompassing all objectives aiming to examine pivotal factors behind intensifying US-China rivalry, analyse security and economic challenges, and explore strategies available for Pakistan to pursue its national interests in an era of a possible neo-cold War is required. This is a need of the time.

1.9 Conceptual framework

This research aims to explore the escalating U.S.-China competition through the lens of International Relations theory, offensive realism. John Mearsheimer, an American international relations scholar and a political scientist, developed key concepts of this theory to understand global changing dynamics driven by great power rivalry. His famous book, “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics” published in 2001, outlines and explain behavior of great powers in an anarchic international system through offensive realism and its major assumptions.

The Five core assumptions of Mearsheimer’s theory are:

1. The International system is anarchic, referring to the absence of any absolute and coercive authority to limit states’ behaviour. States’ possess offensive capabilities which they may use against another state.
2. There is no guarantee that states will refrain from using their offensive power against each other. States primarily prioritize their survival in this system, as it is the means for achieving all other ends.
3. States are rational actors pursuing their interests logically with goal of minimizing risks and maximizing benefits to ensure their survival.
4. States primarily prioritize their survival in this system, as it is the means for achieving all other ends.
5. States are rational actors, pursuing their interests logically with goal of minimizing risks and maximizing benefits to ensure their survival (Steinsson, 2014).

Mearsheimer argues that great powers possess competitive and dominative tendencies. Great power rivalry still continues in the post-Cold War world. The anarchic international system causes a security dilemma among states, leading them to act towards each other. They prevent each other from gaining power and dominance. Moreover, great

powers are not assuaged with status quo; instead they seek power maximization and hegemony (Myšička, 2021).

Keeping in view the above-described great powers' behavior, the global superpowers, the U.S. and China, possess hegemonic tendencies and are competing for dominance in Asia. Shift in U.S foreign policy, the Pivot to Asia and China's 2013 Belt and Road Initiative clearly indicate increasing dominance tendencies and a looming dangerous competition. China's geopolitical ambitions are growing with continuous ascendance at the military, economic, and diplomatic level. China rise has reformed global politics and international economic trends (Zhao, 2021).

John Mearsheimer, in his article “Anarchy and the Struggle for Power” states that there exists prevalence of fear and mistrust among great powers in an anarchic global system. According to him, “There is a little room for trust among states. For sure, the level of fear varies across time and space, but it cannot be reduced to a trivial level. From the perspective of any one great power, all other great powers are potential enemies”. Great powers tend to be power maximizers, gaining hegemony. For this, they are in never ending economic and military advancement race (Modebadze, 2020).

Geopolitical competition, trade wars, technological tensions, partnerships and alliances, economic initiatives, ideological differences, and regional and global hegemonic aspirations feature this emerging U.S.-China competition (Madan, 2021).

. Keeping in view, Mearsheimer's theory on great powers' behavior, this research study explores contemporary lurking great power rivalry from the perspective of offensive realism.

This research study utilizes concept of strategic hedging which gained prominence in the Post-Cold War era, to navigate the tides of great power competition in 21st Century. Hedging refers to an alignment or national security strategies with a mixed approach of cooperation and confrontation. This is contrasted with bandwagoning and balancing approaches that were adopted by small states in Cold War era. Scholars started considering this concept important and necessary as global dynamics are changing. They found pervasive theoretical paradigms to be inadequate (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019).

International relations scholars, Christopher Layne and Evelyn Goh, have significantly contributed in development and understanding of strategic hedging through their

works. . This concept addresses questions regarding the current changing international dynamics, such as: How do states incline towards rising powers that may threaten their security and economic interests? If states have built friendly relations with rising powers, how do they protect themselves against possible relinquishment? How do states' policymakers design a pathway to grapple with lurking security threats in an emerging uncertain international environment? Instead of choosing sides or joining camp politics, states needs to mitigate possible security risks and focus on ensuring national interest (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019).

It becomes crucial for a geopolitically important country like Pakistan to maintain balance effectively in its relations with both rising rivals, U.S and China. It is imperative for Pakistan not to get caught in uncertain international dynamics and to secure its national interest. Maintaining a strategic balance in relations with both the United States and China has become increasingly crucial for Pakistan to safeguard its interests amid growing tensions between these global powers. "This strategy helps Pakistan safeguard its interests and navigate the complexities of international politics," Baqir Sajjid associated with the Wilson Center, a Washington based think tank.

In the current era, U.S-China, Pakistan-China and U.S-India relations possess complexities with both differences and similarities. These complexities provide Pakistan with opportunities to acclimate its strategy to leverage the multifaceted situation in its own interests. It is in Pakistan's interest to pursue a smart balanced foreign policy not completely leaning towards any great power, to tackle and focus on non-traditional security threats, and favour peace in South Asia. Leaning too much towards one great power will upset the opposing rising power, causing harm to Pakistan's national interests, which are highly dependent on U.S. and China (Siddiqui, 2022)

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research methodology will be adopted:

1.10.1 Research Design

The pivotal factors behind intensification of US-China rivalry are examined and its security and economic challenges encountered by Pakistan are analyzed. Furthermore, this research study explores the strategies Pakistan can employ to maintain a balance in its relations with both the U.S. and China. The study uses the theory of offensive realism and the

concept of strategic hedging to produce in-depth insights into this emerging complex issue. An exploratory qualitative research methodology is employed.

1.10.2 Instruments

Data for the study is collected from primary and secondary resources. To collect primary data, official government documents are utilized. Secondary sources such as books, research articles, research papers, think tank articles, journals, news articles, and available interviews will be utilised.

1.10.3 Data Analysis

The collected data is analysed on an interpretative and descriptive level. Theory of offensive realism and concept of strategic hedging is utilized to analyse US-China rivalry and geopolitical implications for Pakistan.

1.11 Organization of the Study

The organization of the study refers to structuring of the research study in sequential, logical and coherent manner. This study is divided into five chapters.

1.11.1 Chapter 1

This chapter comprises an introduction that presents an overall picture of this research. The Introduction is followed by a statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the research, delimitation of the research, literature review, the theoretical framework, research methodology, and finally, the organization of the study is outlined. This research study employs the theory of offensive realism and the concept of strategic hegemony under conceptual framework.

1.11.2 Chapter 2

This chapter of the research study examines the pivotal factors behind the intensification of the unfolding US-China rivalry, especially in the post-Obama period, with a special emphasis on the “trade war” as a crucial aspect of this rivalry.

1.11.3 Chapter 3

This chapter analyses the security and economic challenges for Pakistan amidst evolving US-China competition

1.11.4 Chapter 4

The fifth chapter explores the strategies that Pakistan can adopt to effectively balance its relations with both the U.S. and China. It also puts forth recommendations, a conclusion, and references.

1.11.5 Chapter 5

This chapter puts forth a conclusion, findings, and references.

CHAPTER 2

US CHINA TRADE WAR POST-OBAMA PERIOD

2.1 Historical Background

The Disintegration of USSR in 1991 which ended the cold war, left the US as sole superpower and in a position of becoming a regional hegemon with no competitor in Western as well as Eastern hemisphere. The US began engaging in world politics through the international institution, the United Nations. Since its formation in 1945, the US is the largest donor of this institution. Beijing, an emerging global power, initiated ambitious global infrastructure project known as Belt Road and Initiative under new Xi Jinping's approach of "Economic diplomacy with Chinese characteristics". BRI aims to integrate three large continents: Europe, Africa and Asia. Later on, Implementation of investment projects also included Latin America (Laila, 2023).

Barack Obama, who was the 44th President of the United States from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017, witnessed a US-China relationship that initially started on a positive note, later on faced a downturn, and finally, it stabilized. During his eight-year term, Barack Obama's administration concentrated on six main diplomatic goals.

The main task was to solve the financial burden of maintaining the United States' top position in the world, especially the high costs of the previous wars. Obama tried to reduce this problem by removing the military forces from Iraq. Nevertheless, the criticism about the administration's involvement in the Syrian and Libyan wars after the Arab Spring came up, and the prudence of these actions were questioned (Canrong, 2016).

The second goal of Obama was to revive the US economy. Although the G20 Summit was hosted, macroeconomic strategies were developed, and pledges were made to double the exports, the results did not meet the expectations. Exports rose by 60%, which is much lower than China's 150% increase. Besides, the resurgence of the manufacturing jobs in the United States was still not a reality (Canrong, 2016).

The third goal of the Obama administration was the fight against terrorism, which was emphasized by the successful killing of Osama bin Laden. Nonetheless, the later emergence of the Islamic State was the main reason for the reversal of the former achievements (Canrong, 2016).

Fourthly, Barack Obama worked on the global problems such as climate change and nuclear disarmament during his presidency, with China playing a significant role in these affairs. He also emphasized on the nuclear security, thereby winning him the Nobel Peace Prize. Even though the nuclear program of Iran was improved, still there were difficulties regarding the nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula (Canrong, 2016).

The fifth goal was to fix the United States' worldwide reputation that was damaged by the previous administration. Attempts were made to strengthen the ties with the old allies and rebuild the trust in the U.S., hence the result was not always the same. For instance, the restoration of diplomatic ties with Cuba was well-received in Latin America, but the Republican-controlled Congress did not want to ease the economic sanctions against Cuba, meaning that the bilateral relations did not normalize (Canrong, 2016).

Obama's sixth and last aim was to shift the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia Pacific region, which he called "the return to the Asia Pacific." He stressed the significance of the region and referred to himself as "America's first Pacific president. On the other hand, the rise of China's economic and military power was both an opportunity and a challenge for the US in this strategic shift (Canrong, 2016).

2.2 Returning to the Asia Pacific

During the Obama administration, a policy was designed to change the United States' involvement in the Asia-Pacific region, which is often called the Pacific pivot. This project was aimed at the change of American interest and the distribution of the resources from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific area

. The main purpose of the Pacific Pivot was to reassert the United States' position as a major actor in the region, at the same time, it also pursued its geopolitical and economic interests (Robertson, 2017).

In a speech delivered to the Australian parliament, the departing President Barack Obama stressed that the Asia-Pacific region was the most important factor to be considered in US security policy. This guess is usually seen as a clear sign of the United States' effort to counterbalance China's plans for regional dominance (BBC News, 2021).

The US government predicted that the Asia-Pacific region, which has China as its centre, would be the main factor in the shaping of 21st century. Campbell and Andrews, who are the experts in the pivot at the Asia Group, claim “The emerging narrative in the Asia Pacific region was one of American lack of strategic focus and decline, in a time when many in the region sought greater U.S. presence and leadership”(US engagement is less) (Kurt & Andrew, 2013).

The rise of China has transformed the power structure in the Asia-Pacific, which has influenced both the US and its regional allies. China's growth, both in terms of economy and military, has caused the disputes over the resources and the increase of the security issues. This creates a difficulty for the United States to maintain its influence in the area. The US has started its pivot to Asia and has strengthened its connection with the allies to counter the Chinese influence. Although China is improving its military power, especially the PLA-N and Coast Guard, the US is carrying out naval exercises with its allies like Australia, India, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea regularly. This strategic move recognizes the necessity of a new balance in the new times after China's rise, following the long period of Middle East-oriented strategies that have lessened the US global influence. The Pivot to Asia is a clear indication of the US government's determination to interact with Asia and maintain regional stability by averting the Chinese dominance (Montemalo, 2016).

2.3 China Economic and Technological Rise

Through the adoption of the power parity (PPP) is a concept used to compare the economic productivity and standards of living between countries) (PPP), China not only became the largest economy in the world but also recorded a significant moment in history which was similar to the US surpassing Britain in the 1872 in real GDP. At the beginning of 2016, China's real GDP was 12% higher than the US. By the end of 2015, the Chinese manufacturing output had reached the level of US and Japan combined, which is a record-breaking achievement in the history of the Chinese (Canrong,2014).

Besides, China has indeed made huge achievements in technology. China has been the first country in the world in patent filings for five years in a row. In such a technological sector, a lot of Chinese companies are struggling to compete with the few foreign rivals. Nature Index has based its data on 68 natural science journals and has stated that China's

contribution to high-quality science is now the second largest in the world, after the US (Canrong, 2014).

2.4 Escalating US China Trade War

The United States is generally recognized as the world's top superpower; hence its dominant economy, strong military, large defense budget, and important role in the global financial institutions are the reasons for it. Nonetheless, the emergence of China as the world's second biggest economy, which is characterized by the high exports and the substantial investments in the Asian, African and Latin American countries, and the 'win-win strategy' which is focused on the peaceful coexistence, is a serious challenge for the US and makes the bilateral relations more complicated. Although the US has the economic, military, and technological superiority over China, the US is worried about China's growing influence in the world markets, military activities in the South China Sea, and technological advancements (Kiani, 2023).

In order to maintain its leading position, the US has chosen a unique path of dealing with China, thus, blending the two aspects of assertiveness and passive resistance. At the NATO Summit 2021, President Biden stressed that 'autocratic powers' like China and Russia, which are the main challenges, should not be allied with. The National Security Strategy of 2022 said that China should be regarded as a strategic competitor and 'revisionist power' accepting China as its major geopolitical concern. Vigilant of China's growing power, the US is actively working together with its allies on different areas, such as technology, economy, and defense. Such initiatives as QUAD and AUKUS are meant to be the platforms for collective action in the pursuit of the common goals (Kiani, 2023).

The U.S. competitiveness with the China appears to be on two levels: one is upholding military and technological supremacy, and economic pre-eminence. Economic competition is the core of US China emerging rivalry. Washington is concerned about China's assertive military, technological and economic posture globally. USA possesses superiority over China in terms of military and geopolitics where as China's economic influence is surpassing that of the U.S. The U.S. is ensuring its military leverage over China economic competitiveness through formation of geopolitical alliances such as AUKUS and QUAD, and Indo Pacific strategy. This is also its deterrent approach as tensions are increasing around Taiwan, which is strategic asset for the U.S (Hussain, 2023).

The emerging geopolitical and geostrategic competition between two great powers is deepening uncertainty and risk in the world. They are struggling for the production of semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence. The US, who is ahead of China in terms of semiconductors supply chains, making China under pressure through investment restrictions and export curbs. China has an advantage in minerals supply chain, such as Lithium and Cobalt, essential for production of EVs, solar panels and batteries. This has been countered by the US response, which is tariffs' imposition on Chinese goods and automobiles (Chaudhry, 2024).

2.5 The Beginning of the Trade Tensions under President Trump's Era

Former President Trump played a huge role in deterioration of trade relationship between the US and China. In the 1980s, New York Times reflected on President's enthusiasm for trade barriers in an article. In 1988, Oprah Winfrey interviewed him during which Trump stated that exports encompassing videocassette and automobiles were nothing compared to American ones, since they "knock the hell out of our companies" (Tankersley & Landler, 2019). The U.S. and China, the world's largest economies, are engaged in an unprecedented trade war. The trade war is evolving into a neo-cold war resulting in emphasizing ideological differences, harsh trade practices, and undermining each other's international image (Haung, 2021). In May 2019, President Donald Trump imposed 25% import tariffs on Chinese goods worth \$250 Billion. Administrative process was also initiated to cover rest of U.S. imports from China, worth \$300 Billion (Crowley, 2019).

In 2018, China retaliated with first round of 25% tariffs on Chinese imports from the U.S., worth \$50 Billion. China responded to US heightening of trade war in 2019, by an additional imposition of 25% tariffs on Chinese imports from the U.S. (Crowley, 2019). President Trump believed unjust Chinese trade practices to be the source of U.S. economic stagnation and other interests. He thought Imposing tariffs on Chinese exports would induce shift in policy in China (Crowley, 2019).

The tit-for-tat trade battle caused a decrease in bilateral trade between two great powers. This didn't translate into increase in job production in the U.S. The reason was that Chinese exports were being imported by other countries. In October 2019, both states reached a concluding Phase One deal. The deal entailed China's commitment to increase importing U.S. products avoid technology transfer, and safeguard intellectual property rights with

regard to other countries. This deal outlined U.S. decrease in tariffs to half and inhibiting the intended future tariffs on U.S. imports worth \$200 billion (Munte, 2023).

During these turbulent years, the Trump presidency didn't utilize WTO dispute resolving mechanisms. Instead, the Trump administration marginalized WTO, imposing unilateral retaliatory tariffs. The Institution's authority was undermined. According to the Rachel Brewster, a Law Professor, Trump adopted strategies on three fronts: obstructing WTO's Appellate Body's nominations, strengthening of national security as justification of tariffs imposed, and lastly, dealing with trade disputes unilaterally (Munte, 2023).

2.6 Biden Trade Approach towards China

It became apparent in the case of China too that Beijing wasn't binding to the commitments agreed upon during the Phase One deal. However, 2020 pandemic caused devastating impacts on Asian giants; economies. It was predicted before pandemic that China's economy would rise by 6% in the year 2020. But only 2.3% growth was noticed at the end of year (Bown, 2021). In the midst of unfavourable circumstance, Joe Biden, the US's 46th president was expected to take a tough position on Beijing's social and economic policies. He continued trade restrictions and didn't lift imposed tariffs (Steinberg & Tan, 2022). Technology war between two economic giants is also intensifying with time. Beijing launched "Made in China 2025", also known as MIC 25, state policy which intends to ascend China as a technology world leader important, for the fourth technological revolution. The US is combating and making sure restrict China's capacity advancement in technology sector by utilizing every possible sanction, policy, and tool (Schoenbaum, 2023). A notable difference in trade policy approach among both Trump and Biden administrations seems to be "polite protectionism" as described by the former WTO Appellate Body judge James Bacchus (2022), Biden trade policy tactics didn't convince many Americans. "World Trade Report" by WTO 2007 stated, "the absence of US leadership in trade (no trade policy), coupled with neo-protectionism (no-trade policy), ultimately constitutes a continuation of the Trump-era trade tactics" (Schropp, 2022).

2.7 Factors behind US China Trade War

There are three main factors which have contributed to the fuelling of U.S. trade war with China. First, the trade imbalance between the two countries has impacted the job market in the U.S. Second, concerns have been raised about China's economic policies and the

protection of intellectual property. Lastly, the U.S. implementation of certain trade measures towards China has been met with responses from China, reflecting the complexities of their economic and political relationship (Kiani, 2023).

2.8 United States Disruption Strategy

In order to undermine China's increasing technological, economic and diplomatic outreach, the US has implemented a disruption strategy encompassing various actions, procedures, and tactics to counter potential threats and risks to the state's national security by emerging rivals (Kiani, 2023). The US is rethinking its economic approach to counter China's economic expansion which is becoming a looming threat for US's hegemony (Kiani, 2023). In the years 2018 and 2019, Trump initiated imposing tariffs on its counterpart under the Trade Act of 1974, putting forth Section 301. Imposed tariffs on Chinese goods were worth \$200 Billion. The aim was to hinder economic and technological growth of china globally. China imports decreased from 22% to 18% (Kiani, 2023).

The US has additionally enacted the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act 2022, aimed at prohibiting Xinjiang imports, due to suspected forced labour exercises. As a part of a strategy shifting from fossil fuels, the U.S. is directing towards regulating China's supply chains essential for renewable energy production sources. This would cost U.S. economic pain in short term, but in the longer term, it would fulfil US goal of containing a rising China necessary to maintain its supremacy globally. In 2021, US arranged and hosted a Global Summit on Supply Chain Resilience, focused on investment and free trade agreements, encouraging its partner states to collaborate against China (Kiani, 2023).

The US is also employing strategy of disruption in South Asia, claiming CPEC as a debt trap for Pakistan and other regional countries. CPEC could possibly strengthen China's dominance in the region, endangering the US and India's hegemonic aspirations. Economic and political turbulence in Pakistan and Sri Lanka could be viewed as a result of US influence and disruption strategy. Also, recent instability in Afghanistan and Iran is beneficial for US interests in the region (Kiani, 2023).

China's growth rate has faced ups and downs in recent years. In 2019, growth rate of China was 5.95%, slowing down to 2.24% by 2020. In 2021, growth boosted up to to 8.45% but it faced a decline of 3% in 2022. This is a significantly lower growth rate compared to

the annual 10% growth rate since 1978. This economic slump points out to an emerging development disparity between eastern and western regions of China (Kiani, 2023).

The US exploits China's internal issues, such as human rights violations, Hong Kong unrest, authoritative governance structures, and Taiwan issue, to gain an opportunity to impede China's expansion and tarnish its image globally. The US, due its large military presence in the region, can provoke military conflicts with China in in Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, India and the South China Sea (Kiani, 2023).

The Biden administration has declared huge curtailments on Chinese imports, amounting to \$18 billion. This move is going to create massive tensions, igniting a trade war further between world's largest economies. Targeted areas include electric vehicles (from 102.5% from 27.5%), lithium batteries(from 7.5% to 25%), semiconductors(from 25% to 50%), and critical minerals(from 0% to 25%). The administration has also announced tariffs on steel and aluminium, up to 25%. Such skyrocketing hikes in tariffs on Chinese imports are aimed at alienating China's unfair trade practices, including the violation of intellectual property rights, technology transfer, and innovation (Hessler, 2024).

2.9 US China Technology War

On the technological front, the US views China's technological advances, particularly in the areas of artificial intelligence, 5G wireless networks, and artificial intelligence as a strategic risk. In response the United States began a campaign to denounce China's technological advances, alleging that China used them for China is using it for nefarious purposes such as cyber-attacks and espionage , which threatens the national security of the United States (Kiani, 2023). However, the reality is that the United States seeks to maintain its economic competitiveness and protect its businesses from competition, even from countries considered allies, in order to maintain its hegemony.

The US has prohibited Chinese technology companies including Huawei, Sense Time, Hikvision, Megvii, TikTok and ZTE from doing business with US companies, arguing that they could be forced to hand over confidential customer information as they are related to Chinese companies. The Trump administration also banned the use of 800 Chinese drones to monitor US government installations, due to national security threats. The semiconductor and chip technology sector is under intense scrutiny in the United States, as measures have been taken to limit production capacity in China (Kiani, 2023).

Taiwan's Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited (TSMC) and South Korea manufacture 92% of the highest-performing chips, while the US drastically reduced chip production from 37% in 1990 to 10% (Mehwish, 2023). To increase its output of chip technology, the US has restricted China's manufacturing capabilities of NAND type flash memory with over 128 layers and logic circuits with technology generations below 14-16 nm to produce advanced semiconductors. Other countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, the EU and Germany have also implemented similar restrictions on Chinese semiconductor exports (Kiani, 2023).

South Korea and Taiwan's produce 92% of the top-performing chips, while the United States has seen a reduction in chip production from 37% in 1990 to 10%. To increase technology chips production, the United States has limited China's manufacturing capabilities for NAND flash memory to more than 128 layers, and allowing logic circuits with technology generations below 14 to 16 nanometers. Other states such as the Netherlands, Japan, Germany, and the Netherlands, the European Union have also imposed similar curtailment on China's semiconductor exports (Kiani, 2023).

2.10 The U.S. and Huawei

The US considers Huawei as a spying technology for the Chinese government, due to which the US keeps its network infrastructure away from this technology. Former President Trump imposed a ban on Huawei. Later, in July 2019, the administration adopted an ease on Huawei, delaying 10% tariffs worth \$300 billion. In return, China also promised to import US agricultural products. In response, China promised to buy American agricultural products (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2023).

US trade curbs are impacting both Huawei and China. Unable to operate in the US, Huawei adopted to gain share in the Chinese smartphone market, followed by a strict domestic marketing approach. The company acquired market share from its opponents Vivo, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Apple. This move harmed the US-based Apple, causing 7.5 million fewer iPhones to be imported into China (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2023). Chinese companies are decreasing their dependency on US chip suppliers amid US trade restrictions. Some Chinese smartphone companies are adopting Huawei 5G modem, despite its larger size, over Qualcomm first-generation 5G chipset. This is impacting the US chip maker company by a loss of Chinese customers (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2023).

2.11 The US-China Trade Disparity

The trade deficit of the US with China is a major cause of the trade war. Former President Donald Trump clearly reflected in his tweet, on April 4, 2018, stating, "the United States has a Trade Deficit of \$500 Billion a year, with Intellectual Property Theft of another \$300 Billion. We cannot let this continue!" Over the past four decades, U.S. imports have consistently exceeded its exports to China (Bade, 2013). The top US exports to China include products from five major sectors: agriculture, computers, transportation, machinery, and chemicals. Aeronautical and automobile products are on the rise, while agricultural export products remain significant. The most important US exports are: civil aircraft, cotton, soybeans, passenger cars, aluminium materials, coal, corn and electronic circuits (Bade, 2013).

China is the largest supplier of various manufactured products to the US. In 2020, top US imports encompassed toys, sporting goods, furniture, metals plastics, steel, electrical machinery and textiles. China largely exports agricultural products to United States, including vegetables, fruits, juices and nutritional preparations, making China the world's seventh largest exporter of agricultural products (Burke, 2021)

2.12 U.S. Concerns Over China's Unfair Trade Practices

Chinese unjust industrial policies and intellectual property rights violations are a major contention between both superpowers. Intellectual property, specifically in high-tech areas, is essential for industrial sectors such as pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, aerospace consumer electronics, computers, and automobiles (Akhtar & Fergusson, 2014). Many Americans find it most challenging to engage in business with China. The reason is inadequate safeguards and breaches of intellectual property rights by China. China also pressurizes the US against disclosing its IP and technology to its Chinese counterparts. Although China has made efforts to protect IP rights, the financial loss to the US due to these issues amounts to \$50 Billion annually (Hassani, 2023).

Another main area of trading concern for the US with its counterpart is promoting domestic industries through subsidies and import restrictions. The Requirement for entrance into the Chinese market is forming a partnership with local companies in Joint Venture or transfer of technology to Chinese partners in order to establish local production facilities, thus uplifting them as rivals in industries (Liu & Woo, 2018).

WTO policies let developing countries utilize tariffs and subsidies to boost small industries. Although China has been prospering economically for the past 40 years, it still relies on these tools. China banned huge foreign companies such as Google, Paypal, eBay, and WhatsApp which enabled the country to give rise to its own giant tech companies like Baidu, Taobao, Alibaba and, Weibo. Such exercise of tools disturbs developed countries' engagement with China (Liu & Woo, 2018).

2.13 Undermining U.S. Global Standing

The trade war is also fuelled by the United States perceiving China as a potential threat to its international image and global hegemony. China under Xi Jinping, is looking forward to dominating areas such as technology, economy, waterways, diplomacy, and military. China aims to become the world's top military by 2049, raising concerns in the Pentagon about nuclear and military expansion. China nuclear warheads are estimated to increase to 1500 by 2030. Its naval and aerial forces are also strengthening with each passing year. To establish sovereignty in the South China Sea, China is building military establishments, artificial islands, and ports. These practices have raised concerns among international stakeholders and regional countries (Mizokami, 2022). To counter this, the US has increased its naval and military exercises in the region (Center for Preventive Action, 2022).

A notable trade and technology strategic threat for the USA appears to be China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Made in China 2025 (MC-25). BRI aims to implement flagship projects, leading to larger investments and infrastructure development across densely populated continents (McBride & Noah, 2021). Made in China-25 initiative, proposed in 2015, aims to make China, by 2025, a leading global power in high-technology industries. This initiative covers areas such as robotics, solar cells, machine tools, aviation, micro-chips, medical devices, electronic sensors, and telecom devices (Liu & Woo, 2018). Under this initiative, China is looking forward to achieving self-reliance in high-tech areas and the production of materials required for such industries. MC-25 is based on enhanced productivity and advanced technology, establishing China as global dominant in high-tech industries by the 100th anniversary of PRC's establishment (Liu & Woo, 2018). To accomplish the MC-25 objective, the Chinese government is employing financial incentives such as providing subsidies, low taxes and interest, technology transfer, and inviting foreign investment (McBride & Chatzky, 2019).

The historical trajectory of U.S.-China relations has been shaped by a complex interplay of economic, military, and geopolitical factors. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. emerged as the dominant global power, influencing international politics through institutions like the United Nations. However, China's rapid economic growth and technological advancements, particularly under Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, have increasingly challenged U.S. hegemony. The evolving U.S.-China relationship highlights a complex interplay of economic, technological, and geopolitical strategies, with each nation seeking to assert its influence on the global stage. The intensifying competition, particularly in trade and technology, signals not just a clash of economic interests but a deeper struggle for global dominance. As both powers navigate this rivalry, the world watches closely, aware that the outcomes of this confrontation will shape international relations and global power dynamics for years to come.

CHAPTER 3

GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF US-CHINA RIVALRY FOR PAKISTAN

John Mearsheimer states that the objectives of a global hegemon are to exert influence and power over large distances. A global hegemon needs to increase its power in surrounding neighbourhood. It doesn't allow other major powers to intervene and exert dominance in its area of influence. A rising hegemon seeks to freely roam around the world and intervene in other regions, preventing ascending powers from achieving dominance in other regions of the world. At a tactical level, a global hegemon creates problems in the area of rival powers' dominance. Another tactic it adopts is to end the rival power's ascension and regional dominance as soon as possible, in order to overcome the threats and troubles that it can cause globally, generating from this (Mearsheimer, 2001).

What happens between the US and rising China in terms of geopolitical and geo-economic competing strategies will have broader geo-political implications for the South Asia region. In this context, John Mearsheimer in a conversation with one of the leading Pakistani journalists Ejaz Haider has also predicted that the current geo-political rivalry between the US and China could have implications for India and Pakistan (Dawn International, 2021b). Mearsheimer argued that: The U.S. is increasing its involvement in Indo-Pacific to counter China's dominance in the region. The U.S. and China rivalry will have geopolitical implications for the South Asian region. In an interview with one of Pakistan's leading journalist, Ijaz Haider, John Mearsheimer predicted that the on-going great power competition could impact both Pakistan and India. Probably, India would join the U.S., and Pakistan would side with China, as it is an important strategic partner. The U.S. would try to slough off Pakistan from China (Dawn International, 2021).

3.1 Geographical Position of Pakistan and Geopolitical Dynamics

The geopolitical position of Pakistan attracts the interests of great powers, the U.S. and China interests, as it is located at the junction of significant regions: the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Pakistan acts as the connecting bridge between these regions (Hassan, 2010). The U.S.' main interests are countering China's rise, expanding U.S.-India cooperation, controlling Iran's capacity for nuclear program development, and keeping an eye on Afghanistan's situation after the U.S. withdrawal.

Pakistan became an important strategic partner for China since China initiated the massive infrastructure and investment flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, known as China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Pakistan's proximity to the warm waters of the Arabia Sea and Central Asia enhances the state's significance for China's interests (Ali, 2013).

Pakistan's security and stability are linked with the South Asia environment. The main challenges Pakistan encounters in current times are: the Afghanistan situation after the Taliban's takeover, security concerns with respect to the growing India-U.S. strategic cooperation, and shaping its trajectory amidst U.S.-China competition. Alliances such as the QUAD AND AUKUS, and agreements like the Abraham Accords further, complicate the region's environment for Pakistan (Ahmed, 2018).

3.2 Emerging China-US Tension and its Relevance to Pakistan

3.2.1 Security Challenges for Pakistan

Pakistan's security is impacted by the U.S.-China great game in the Asia Pacific if China procures complete access to the Gwadar Port: This could drag Pakistan into the possible future U.S.-China conflict, as Pakistan would have to allow China's naval presence at Gwadar Port, portraying Pakistan as China's ally. China access to the Indian Ocean could increase Indian security concerns. It has also been reported that PLA soldiers are present in Pakistan's Northern part but this news has yet to be confirmed (Dumbaugh, 2010).

Chinese soldiers and naval forces' possible future presence in the Gwader area could attract negative attention from the U.S. and regional players towards Pakistan (Barry et al, 1998).The Asia-Pacific has become securitized region of the world. Territorial disputes in this area would possibly remain unresolved in the future causing, physical contestation between global and regional powers (Keohane & Nye,1989). The Possibility of a physical conflict between the U.S. and China cannot be entirely ruled out; if this happens in the future, among the few options left for China would be access to Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean through Gwader Port. This would create a precarious South Asian environment, causing India to join U.S. against China and Pakistan. Pakistan would be caught in the middle of two great powers leading to security implications at the regional and global level. Balancing relations with both U.S. and China appears to be a very daunting undertaking for Pakistan. India is already engaged in imputing propaganda against Pakistan. The emerging conflict between great powers is causing a power imbalance and arms Race among hostile neighbours, Pakistan and India. Pakistan's strategic location near oil-rich Middle East powers and Central

Asia make it a significant regional player. Pakistan provides the shortest route to the Arabian Sea. China's massive BRI reflect its will to increase influence in the West Asia. It has made Pakistan as an important economic investment partner to counter U.S.-India strategic nexus. Through CPEC, Pakistan is entangled furthermore in the crossfire between great powers (Riaz, 2016). Recently, China-Pakistan relations have faced challenges including security concerns for Chinese personnel in Pakistan, financial issues in CPEC projects, policy ambiguity, and Beijing's unmet expectations under CPEC, all contributing to a slowdown in both CPEC progress and overall bilateral ties (Syed,2024).

3.2.2 US Concerns Over CPEC

The U.S. keeps expressing uneasiness related to Pakistan-China relations and the unfolding CPEC flagship project (Jaleel et al, 2019). The U.S. has adopted a strategy of funding aid to Pakistan in the past to fulfil its interests. The U.S. is panicked about the rising China and its influence in the region (Rahim et al, 2018). CPEC is foreseen as a project facilitating China in building its positive economic impact around the globe. This makes the U.S. feel threatened, inciting it to respond antagonistically against China (Ahmad, 2018).

Tensions increased when Pakistan opted not to attend the virtual summit based on democracy hosted by the U.S. However, Pakistan did participate a week earlier in China's International Forum on Democracy. Pakistan-U.S. relations faced a further downfall after this. The economic and military aid by the U.S. has drastically decreased after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Now, the U.S. views Pakistan through China's lens (Noor, 2024).

President Joe Biden stated Pakistan as "one of the most dangerous nations in the world" due to the country's possession of "nuclear weapons without any cohesion" (The Express Tribune, 2022).

Under the Trump's administration, BRI was widely criticized. In 2017, James Mattis, Secretary of Defense, argued in front of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that, "In a globalised world, there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating 'one belt, one road',".... Therefore, no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating such a project [BRI]"(Anwar,2024). Mike Pompeo warned Pakistan not to use an IMF loan in the development of China's CPEC. He said, "Make no mistake; we will be watching what the IMF does." CPEC criticism took a further sharp turn when Alice Wells, in 2019, showed concern for CPEC's transparency, debt, and jobs. She

warned that Pakistan's sovereignty is under threat (Khan, 2021). Another attempt by the U.S. appeared this year, imposing sanctions on four entities: three Chinese-based entities, namely Chinese Longde Technology Development Company Limited, Granpect Company Limited, Tianjin Creative Source International Trade Co Ltd, and one is Belarus based: Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (Iqbal, 2024).

3.2.3 Indo Pacific Vision: US-India Cooperation

Under the Donald Trump administration, the Asia Pacific was renamed as Indo-Pacific, as the previous term didn't align with U.S. interests in the region. Through this term, the U.S. emphasized the significance of India for its strategic goals in the Indian and Pacific Ocean (Berk et al, 2019).

In October 2020, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement on Geospatial Cooperation (BECA) a pact was signed between two Indo-Pacific strategic partners the U.S. and India. This pact endorsed sharing of satellite and map information aiming to address rising China threats. BECA is the second foundational agreement that promotes sharing of important data to India for targeting drones and missiles and military effectiveness (Arora & Miglani, 2020). In 2018, another foundational agreement, the Communication Capability and Security Agreement was signed (Philip, 2022). In 2018, Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the U.S. and India after decade of negotiations. This agreement gave India a reach to U.S. military installations. In return, U.S. will get access to India's military installations, fulfilling its interests in the Indo-Pacific. This pact is important as it will ensure converging interests between U.S. and India in the region (Baig, 2022).

India is focusing on strengthening of maritime capability, threatening Pakistan's economic and strategic stability and China's influence. India possesses several ports, among which 12 are major and 10 are minor ones. (Government of India, 2018). India received active support from the U.S. for its hegemonic ambitions in the Indian Ocean to counter China's rising influence. India's strong influence benefits the U.S. (Wong, 2018).

The US has selected and identified India in its National Security Strategy as a "Net Security Provider". Under this umbrella term, India is not only responsible for ensuring its own security but also will provide security to other Indian Ocean region countries, enhancing their capacity and capability through military assistance, diplomacy, and even deployment of forces when required (Ullah & Hayat, 2021).

India's dismissal of the CPEC springs from its territorial dispute over Gilgit-Baltistan as it passes through this area. India considers it as part of Indian Occupied Kashmir. Moreover, India's evocation of Kashmir's status and claim over Ladakh as its own territory reflects this as its counter-response to rising China's influence and Pakistan's engagement in the CPEC (Dutta, 2019).

Pakistan is located at important choke point in the Indo-Pacific region. It lies along important SLOCs, significant for international oil and trade. The country has an Exclusive Economic Zone of approximately 290,000 square kilometres. Pakistan has not yet decided its maritime security border with India, which is a security concern. The CPEC connects the Indo-Pacific's SLOCs with railway and road infrastructure. Thus, the U.S.-China rivalry impacts Pakistan (Farooq & Qazi, 2023).

The U.S. is amplifying its cooperation with India as a counterbalance to China and a net security provider. India is also part of the significant QUAD alliance, further intensifying its role in the region. The QUAD initially appeared to be based on soft power but is gradually moving towards military strengthening among the players. For instance, Australia participated in the Malabar naval exercises arranged by the India in the Bay of Bengal. The militarization of the Indo-Pacific is intensifying with the agreement known as AUKUS, which aims to endow Australia with nuclear submarines (Ahmed, 2018). This increasing Indo-U.S. cooperation directly impacts Pakistan economically and strategically.

3.2.4 US Indo Pacific security alliances:

3.2.4.1 QUAD

Japan's Prime Minister presented the idea of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific in a conference held in Kenya in 2016. This idea was put forth in response to concerns about aggressive rise of China and its BRI initiative. Shinzo Abe's concept aims to ensure free and open navigation in the Indo-Pacific region. Based on this concept, the first in person summit of QUAD alliance, comprising of Australia, the U.S., India and Japan, occurred in 2021 at the White House (Shinzo, 2012).

The first-ever in-person summit meeting of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. was held at the White House on September 24, 2021. In the meeting, the sharing of COVID-19 vaccines and development of infrastructure through the G7's Build Back Better World 19 agenda were talked about. The clear goal of this alliance is to counter China's rise through

increasing their dominance in Asia. Following this meeting, the U.S. withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, leading to Taliban's takeover of the country which further exacerbates the regional security and stability (White house, 2021).

Under the umbrella of QUAD, India seeks naval development, which can have direct security consequences for Pakistan. As India aims to form Blue Water Navy, it could enforce a blockade in the Indian Ocean, creating problems for Pakistan. The statement of the U.S. Navy renews India's hegemonic ambitions in South Asia. "Naval engagements such as these exercises improve the cooperation of US and Indian maritime forces and contribute to both sides' ability to counter threats at sea, from piracy to violent extremism. These engagements also present opportunities to build upon the pre-existing strong relationship between the US and India and allow both countries to learn from each other" (Bashir, 2021).

3.2.4.2 AUKUS

AUKUS, which is the Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States of America Security Pact, aims to endorse a security alliance in the Indo-Pacific, prompting strategic transformation in the region. It is a direct front against China's aspirations in the South China Sea (Brooke et al, 2021). This security front aims for a free and open Indo-Pacific region and seeks to strengthen defense and security cooperation. Under this agreement, the U.S. is willing to transfer nuclear technology to Australia in form of nuclear submarines (Brooke et al, 2021).

AUKUS focuses on enhancing security and technology, especially submarines, which may affect Pakistan's maritime security, as it has a significant coastline along the Indian Ocean and is part of wider Indo-Pacific region. AUKUS focuses on surveillance and intelligence sharing which could Pakistan's maritime capability vulnerabilities. The diplomatic and trade relations with AUKUS countries may get impacted due to US-China increasing competition in the region (Siddique, 2023).

3.2.4.3 BRICS

BRICS, established in 2009, is an association of five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Its objectives are to promote security, economic development, and peace, to reduce the dominance of the U.S. dollars in international market and trade, and to provide financial options other than IMF and World Bank, such as through the New Development Bank (NDB) (Sunday Guardian Live, 2023).

Pakistan was absent from the June 2022 summit due to an objection by a member state of this association, which undoubtedly was India. Although Pakistan shares borders with two of BRICS' countries, India will continuously pose hurdles in Pakistan's access to BRICS and will not allow Pakistan access to this association easily. (Sunday Guardian Live, 2023). Pakistan's trade opportunities could be impacted by increased trade among BRICS countries, such as with China and India. Fostering strong relations with BRICS can cause issues with Pakistan's important trade partners, the U.S. and EU (Sunday Guardian Live, 2023).

3.3 Afghanistan

After the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban rapidly regained control of the country and the government in Kabul. Despite initial promises to respect human rights, the Taliban steadily reimposed its strict interpretation of sharia-based law on the country, including public executions, amputations, and flogging. Since the takeover, those living under Taliban rule have witnessed the regression and reversion of any gains in liberal and democratic rights and freedoms over the last twenty years. The Taliban has imposed harsh restrictions on women's rights to education, employment, free speech and movement, and dress (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). Meanwhile, Afghanistan continues to face one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, exacerbated by devastating economic shocks and the worsening effects of climate change. These factors have caused widespread displacement, poverty, and food insecurity; an estimated 23.7 million Afghans required humanitarian aid as of February 2024 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKAP), the Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State, also continues to target civilians through bombings and other attacks, contributing to on-going instability and conflict.

China, Afghanistan and Pakistan have pledged to further strengthen trilateral cooperation on security and counterterrorism at a meeting of the three nations' foreign ministers in Islamabad. China's foreign ministry said, "Afghanistan's participation in Belt and Road cooperation and supports Afghanistan's integration into regional economic cooperation and connectivity"(Aljazeera,2023). Pakistan forging links with Taliban and joint working with China could attract trouble from the U.S..

Afghanistan's deteriorating situation after the Taliban's takeover is leading to a huge rise in terrorism within Afghanistan and its surrounding neighbours. The country is almost dependent on foreign aid, is isolated from the rest of the world, and is going through a severe

economic and human security catastrophe. According to the World Food Program in 2021, only about 5 per cent of Afghan families possess enough food. All this can cause rise in terrorism (BBC News, 2021).

Pakistan's concerns include involvement of India in Afghanistan, endangering Pakistan's security and stakes. Another major concern is the rise of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. The country has seen a rise in terrorist attacks within borders. NATO's sudden and abrupt withdrawal had created a security vacuum, threatening regional stability, and directly impacting Pakistan's security and interests, such as CPEC (Ahmed, 2018).

3.4 Economic Challenges for Pakistan

Viewing China's rise as an antagonistic threat to the U.S.'s great power status, relations between both countries is deteriorating economically and politically. Mistrust is rooted in the difference in their political and economic systems. On one hand, both countries share economic interests and are significant interdependent trade partners (Saud, Arif, 2020). On the other hand, the U.S. under the Trump administration has a tit-for-tat approach in the form of hostile trade practices (Hass, 2018).

Under these turbulent circumstances, Pakistan struggles to maintain balanced relations with both the U.S. and China. China is an important economic partner for Pakistan. Under the Imran Khan government, it was stated that the country's future lies with China as an economic partner. China also supports Pakistan in many international challenges that the country faces. On the other hand, the U.S. remained a prominent source of military and economic aid. But with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, aid and support have drastically decreased from the U.S. Meanwhile, Pakistan finds more economic support and investment from China (Keeryo et al, 2020).

3.4.1 The US-China Trade War and Pakistan

The economic rivalry between the U.S. and China places Pakistan in a struggling position, as both great powers are significant trading partners for Pakistan (Pro Pakistani, 2019). During 2020-2021, Pakistan exports to the U.S. were Rs. 471 billion, and imports from the U.S. were about Rs.692.6 billion. Compared to China, Pakistan exported approximately Rs. 219 billion where imports from China were Rs.1394.3 billion (Mohtasib, 2020).

In past years, the U.S. has reduced military and economic support to Pakistan, as it has started viewing Pakistan through China's lens. The U.S. has increased cooperation with India, calling it as a net security provider. China has remained biggest investor and economically supportive of Pakistan for the last eight years. It has provided modern warships and submarines to Pakistan. Despite political and security challenges, China has always been there to support Pakistan. But when it comes to the trade deficit resulting from trade agreements that benefit China's exports more than Pakistan, China seems to be less of an all-weather friend (Khan, 2023). The CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) projects aim to enhance Pakistan's infrastructure by investing in road and railway networks, which will connect and develop key economic zones along the corridor. These routes include Gwadar-Hoshab, Khuzdar-Bisma, the Karachi-Lahore Motorway, and the Karakoram Highway. The improved connectivity is expected to boost inland trade and investment, providing better market access for goods and consumers (Fatima, et al,2019).. Additionally, nine Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are being established, focusing on industrial growth through enhanced infrastructure and energy projects. This development will help diversify Pakistan's exports to the international market, strengthening the country's economic position in the long term (Fatima, et al,2019).

The United States (US) remained the top export destination for Pakistani products during the first eleven months of the financial year 2023-24, followed by China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)(The Express Tribune, 2024).Pakistan's total exports to the U.S., UK, EU, and Canada account for 55% whereas in the case of China, it is 11% (khan, 2023). Pakistan exports more to the U.S. than to China. China is the investor and supplier, while the US is the buyer and largest export market for Pakistan, which is detrimental to its economic interests. Therefore, Pakistan cannot tilt towards on side because the U.S. is relevant to its economic pursuits (Khan, 2023).

If Pakistan adopts a provocative stance amid the U.S.-China rivalry, this could jeopardize Pakistan's economic interests, such as CPEC, export market, its position in FATF, terrorism, and attract less foreign direct investment. Therefore, Pakistan must figure out a way that is crucial for its survival in the complex contemporary era (Mohan, 2022).

According to the US Office of Trade Representatives' reports, U.S. economic assistance to Pakistan faced a significant decline to \$650 million. The China-Pakistan economic bond increased with multilateral and bilateral projects. They both support each

other on international platforms, securing each other's interests. Pakistan received Chinese investments of about \$2.3 million, as compared to U.S. private investments of approximately \$823 million. This disparity was expected with the initiation of flagship project of BRI, CPEC (Washington DC, 2020).

3.4.2 The CPEC quandary

U.S. political analysts consider CPEC as one of the main reason for constraints in U.S.-Pakistan declining relations. According to them, “how Washington can ever develop a broad and strategic partnership with a nation that is closely allied with America’s top strategic rival – a country that Trump administration views not only as a strategic competitor but also as a national security threat”. They argue that “Beijing’s investment models around the world entail a lot of opacity, very little technology transfer, and the use of Chinese labor” – moreover, “the U.S. model is much better because it brings real benefits to host countries and does not ensnare them in debt traps” (Abbas,2019).The Assistant Secretary of State for South Asians Affairs, Alice Well, criticized CPEC in her speeches, claiming it as not based on transparency and had not proved as game-changer for Pakistan’s economy and its people.(Dawn, 2019). She urged Pakistan to ponder its involvement in this project (Syed, 2020).Pakistan and China was shocked to hear such public statements by the US envoy.

Professor Xuemei Qian, Professor of China’s Peking University stated “Pakistani people... believe it [CPEC] is their hope to change their lives”, while for China, it is “just a project of the BRI.” Pakistani people consider CPEC as fate changer for the country’s economy, “However, whether CPEC can really change Pakistan, or to what extent can it change, is a question that can only be answered when it is completed,” she states. At the moment she said she was more concerned “whether CPEC can be implemented successfully” (Durrani, 2024).

CPEC is also receiving criticism within Pakistan especially considering its slow progress. Perplexity among Pakistani policymakers is increasing, as Pakistan’s sole reliance on Chinese investment and funding could be endangering. They have not been able to procure substantial U.S. financial support (Iqbal et al, 2020).

Pakistan is under severe debt pressure. Out of a total debt of USD 126 billion, China holds approximately US\$ 30 Billion as debt on Pakistan. China is reluctant to provide more financial assistance to Pakistan. Beijing is against IMF restrictions that would spark scrutiny of Chinese loans and further deteriorate Pakistan’s economic struggles (Neog, 2020).

The US-China rivalry has significant geopolitical and geo-economic implications for Pakistan, positioning it at the crossroads of these two global powers' competing strategies. Pakistan's strategic location and its role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) enhance its importance to both nations. However, this alignment with China also draws scrutiny and pressure from the United States, particularly in light of the growing US-India cooperation aimed at countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. As a result, Pakistan faces complex security challenges, particularly related to its involvement in CPEC and the potential militarization of the region. Economically, Pakistan's ties with both the US and China are crucial, yet the ongoing trade tensions between these powers place Pakistan in a precarious position. Balancing these relationships is essential for Pakistan to maintain its strategic and economic interests without provoking either side, as missteps could lead to detrimental consequences for its national security and economic stability.

CHAPTER 4

EMERGING GREAT POWER RIVALRY: PAKISTAN'S OPTIONS FOR MAINTAINING A DELICATE BALANCE

In Geopolitical context, US-China rivalry has far-reaching implications for economically fragile developing countries like Pakistan due to global influence. Thus, it is important to understand impacts of Sino-US competition on economy, military capabilities and diplomatic domain. Balancing relationship between both countries is one of the biggest challenges faced by Pakistan.

4.1 Geopolitical Importance of Pakistan in Regional Politics

Pakistan's geographic location, which connotes it as a hub for trade and regional/trans-regional connectivity, has always played critical role in maintaining relationships with world powers. Pakistan remained strategic ally of US during cold war, however, US never proved to be an all-weather ally. On the other hand, evergreen Pak-China friendship has been furthered due to CPEC. Pakistan's is located at cross roads to Central Asia, Middle East & Far-East, which gives it centrality to OBRI. On other hand, Pakistan maintains cordial relationship with Arab States and CARs. Security turmoil in Afghanistan and use of Afghan soil for terrorism against Pakistan is the major bone of contention between both countries. In

South Asia, Pakistan is the only hurdle to India in becoming net-security provider and regional hegemon. Indo-China rivalry has further complicated the relationship trio due to US strategic alliance with India (Siddiqui, 2023)

4.2 Navigating International Politics: Concept of Strategic Hedging

Post-Cold War, State's National Security Policy has incorporated concept of hedging as a strategy which refers to a combination of cooperative & confrontational elements (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019). Hedging can be defined as state's alignment choice to avoid an obligatory alignment with a global power by giving out ambiguous impression about its shared security interests while retaining the flexibility of shifting courts in future, with the objective of minimizing inherent risks (Lim & Cooper, 2015). The reason behind hedging is to direct ambiguous international politics amid limited foreign policy choices due to great power competition. Thus a country seeks to mitigate risks by pursuing numerous policy options for counteracting effects during situations involving high stakes (Chwee, 2008).

Two arguments: first, cooperation and conflict are critical elements of foreign policy which can co-exist. However, states endeavour to maximise returns and minimize risks while maintaining working relationships. Case in point are China-US and Indo-China relationships where convergences and divergences are manifested. States may exercise various options to connect with each other on certain mutual interests but still be at loggerheads over few issues. US policy reflects anxiety over China's rise yet China is its largest partner in trade (Roberts, 2021).

Second, for political elites hedging has links with preserving security and national cohesion besides balancing out the relationship seesaw between powers due to polar configuration. Thus, internal stability (political & social) is imperative while pursuing hedging strategy (Chwee, 2008).

4.3 Pakistan amid the US-China Power Struggle

Historically, balancing relations with China and US remained relatively easier for Pakistan during Cold War as China was in background. In fact, Pakistan assisted in normalising US-China relationship in early 1970s. (Smith, 2011). China had no issue with Pak-US bilateral ties, rather in December 2001, President Jiang Zemin supported Pakistan's decision to back US during Afghan invasion (BBC News, 2001).

On the other hand, though the US was critical of Pakistan's growing ties with China in the 1960s, Sino-US rapprochement in the 1970s and the US's strategic priorities in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the 2000s meant that Pakistan-China relations did not serve as a roadblock to Pakistan-US relations. Less 1960s, Sino-Pakistan relationship did not act as roadblock to Pak-US ties. However, in last one decade, due to severed US-China ties amid rise of China, Pakistan's foreign policy challenges and risks have increased manifold (Allison, 2017). Though Pakistan has tried to keep a balance in relationship, Pak-US ties have plummeted and keep on oscillating as opposed to China (Markey, 2013). US tilt towards India has further reduced chances of assistance to Pakistan while China has always provided Chinese military assistance to its all-weather friend. However, dependence on China only, may lead to a precarious situation in case US imposes sanctions (Haider, 2022).

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it can benefit from both US and China through successful diplomacy. Good economic ties with US will result in improved foreign direct investment, technological collaboration and better job opportunities. On the other hand, besides military assistance, CPEC offers opportunities in infrastructure development, energy and trade corridors. 27 projects worth \$19 billion have been completed while 63 projects are in pipeline. In terms of job creation, CPEC has the capability to provide 700,000 slots by 2030 (Khan, 2023).

US imports from Pakistan are approximately 250 Mn more than that of China. In 2010, the United States was Pakistan's largest export market. In addition, Pakistani Diaspora contributes \$8.7 billion in remittances, thus necessitating good relations with US (Keeryo, 2020). Pakistan remained security partner of US during Afghan War. In 2022, military leadership of both countries visited each other while in Mar 2023 US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue was held. Meanwhile, in 2022, a sustainment package for Pakistan's F-16 combat aircraft fleet worth \$450 million was announced for Pakistan by Biden Administration despite Indian pressure tactics (Kronstadt, 2023). In the last 1.5 decade, of all armament imports by Pakistan, 75% contribution of worth \$8,469 million was from China which is around 40 % of Beijing's military exports from aircrafts to tanks and Guns (Lalwani, 2023). Similarly, China's growing concerns over terrorism and extremism in its Xinjiang region can provide an avenue for closer security cooperation between Pakistan and China. This cooperation can help Pakistan enhance its own security capabilities and strengthen its position as a regional security partner (Hassan & Khattak, 2023).

4.4 Pakistan's Pursuit of Balance in Turbulent Great Power Politics

China is Pakistan's staunch supporter on Kashmir Cause, wherein, she did not attend G-20 tourism working group meeting in IIOJK despite being a member. On other hand US is permissive of Indian violations in IIOJK thus ceding ground to Beijing in Islamabad. While implementing its Indo-Pacific Strategy, United States should consider its impact on Pakistan, though a difficult preposition (Khan, 2023).

In current turmoil, Pakistan needs to maintain cordial ties with both China and US to evade internal/ external challenges (Chaudhry, 2024).

4.5 Surmounting Pakistan's Foreign Policy Ambiguity

Following recommendations should be implemented to balance relations with US and China:-

- a) Instead of selecting sides Pakistan should keep country's national interests in forefront while formulating policy about relationship with US and China. In this regard, her foreign policy may be guided through the prism of contesting nations' approach towards US-China relationship. Pakistan may use engagement and disengagement strategy in line with global/ regional environment (Maqsood, 2024).
- b) While dealing with the US-China, Pakistan must keep public opinion at forefront and same be communicated to both countries, especially US. Pakistan's focus should be improvement of economy through trade and investment from both countries while ensuring national cohesion and stabilizing internal security. It should create awareness among masses about the need of keeping national interests at forefront instead of emotional sentiments (Maqsood, 2024).
- c) On the other hand, independent foreign policy is inversely proportional to the amount of foreign dependence for which Pakistan has to come out of IMF trap by improving her economic and technological capacity. Pakistan must maintain a strategic partnership and relations with China amid Indo-US burgeoning partnership; however, at the same time it must collaborate with US especially on trade and technological advancements.

As far as US is concerned, Pakistan should collaborate with it on local security, exchange and examination in science and innovation. Due to US influence on United Nations and IMF, Pakistan must be careful while interacting on such forums. In past this approach has helped gaining US support on issues like FATF. United States has always linked her support

to Pakistan with counter terrorism efforts or regional/ international security related issues thus staying on the fence on critical matters is better (Anwar, 2020).

With regards to China, completion of CPEC initiatives is essential to harvest complete benefits and save on money by covering up for loans taken to finance these by accelerating revenue generation activities which are slow and not going as planned. Financial security can also be gained by incorporating other stakeholders in CPEC/ BRI like Iran and Russia. This will leverage Pakistan to further enhance trade and keeping options alive when things go south. Pakistan also needs to improve existing infrastructure to improve capacity of system to handle all the potential investments; SIFC being a step in this stride. The aim of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is to improve the investment climate and attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Its primary goals include streamlining regulatory processes, simplifying investment procedures, and enhancing public-private partnerships. By addressing bureaucratic challenges and creating a more transparent framework, the SIFC aims to boost investor confidence, support infrastructure development, and stimulate overall economic growth. To attract and manage investments, improvement of infrastructure is imperative. So far Pakistan has not been able to attract enough foreign investments which could cater for depleting reserves and high debt to GDP ratio. Thus to attract more and manage investments, improvement of infrastructure is imperative. Divergence on issue of Xiangiang and suppression of Muslims in China has the potential of severing ties between both countries. Besides ties with US/ China, strengthening relations with neighbouring countries, Arab world CARs and Russia is also imperative for Pakistan (Anwar, 2020).

4.6 Pakistan' Forward Trajectory amidst US-China Power Play with Neighbours

4.6.1 Afghanistan

Pakistan assisted US withdrawal from Afghanistan, however, this cooperation must have continued post-withdrawal. Situation in Afghanistan is not stable and it has far reaching implications on Pakistan especially with respect to overflow of terrorism. Both countries should put their joint efforts for ensuring policy of reconciliation. In this regard a joint working group duly incorporating other regional powers should be established which should put in sincere efforts towards stability. China is already taking keen interest in Afghanistan and can leverage her trade dominance to influence Afghan Taliban (Yousuf, 2018).

4.6.2 India

The trajectory of Pakistan's ties with India is dependent upon the outcome of General Elections in India. Pakistan must tailor its approach for dealing with India in the information and diplomatic domain in the aftermath of the hatred campaign against Muslim icons like historical mosques and target killings on foreign soil in Canada, US and Pakistan (Chaduray, 2024). Only smart diplomacy coupled with intensive information campaigns may assist in discrediting India. This approach may also assist in reducing warmth in Indo-US ties.

4.6.3 Iran

Iran is a brotherly Muslim country which is at odds with the US and Israel. Pakistan cannot afford to cut economic ties with Iran at the cost of the US. At the same time, a vacuum in the relationship has been successfully exploited by India in the past. Therefore, Pakistan must maintain a good relationship with Iran and also try to expand CPEC in collaboration with China. Pakistan must make the US understand about energy needs and find a way out for trade with Iran. In this regard, barter trade can reap positive benefits. Pakistan must make efforts to further strengthen Saudi-Iran relations and should seek for inclusion of Saudi in RCD/ECO (Raza 2020).

4.7 AUKUS, BRICS and I2U2

4.7.1 AUKUS

As far as the Indo-Pacific region is concerned, it is imperative to understand the objectives and motives behind AUKUS. Pakistan should improve diplomatic channels with member countries to further its own interests, express its concerns and seek reassurances. Pakistan may approach the European Union (EU), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and non-aligned countries, to intimate its reservations and seek support for a balanced approach in the Indo-Pacific region. This will require diplomatic dialogue, strategic partnerships and trade cooperation which are imperative to improve regional clout. Improvement in the Naval Fleet is the need of the hour to dominate security interests in the Indian Ocean Region (Siddique, 2023).

4.7.2 BRICS

BRICS member countries less India are open for trade and Pakistan should explore opportunities to enhance economic cooperation through trade agreements, business collaborations and investments. This will not only expand market access but also reap

economic benefits. As an observer country, Pakistan should utilize BRICS-Plus mechanism, which promotes collaboration with developing countries beyond permanent members. Thus, giving additional opportunities for cooperation and partnerships (Siddique, 2023).

4.7.3 I2U2

I2U2 alliance incorporating UAE has the potential to impact Pakistan's relations with Arab World if more countries join in. Therefore, there is need to explore chances for strategic partnerships and strengthening of ties with China, Russia and Iran to counterbalance the likely impacts of I2U2 alliance. May be a new alliance or incorporation of China and Russia in ECO/ RCD can prove to be beneficial. Kashmir and Palestine issues should be in focus during various diplomatic manoeuvres through confidence-building measures, dialogue, and engagement with regional as well as international stakeholders (Siddique, 2023).

4.8 Domestic Stability in the 21st Century

As domestic stability is pre-requisite for successful diplomacy and hedging policy, Government should consider five actions to achieve it in earlier timeframe:-

A national dialogue should be called on by PM which should include all political parties, major institutions including universities, business community, diaspora and religious segments. Judiciary, ECP, Military, Intelligence Agencies and Civil Bureaucracy must be on board. The dialogue should focus on major issues like political stability, economy, terrorism, societal tolerance, civil service reforms and education (Chaudhry, 2024).

Second, multipronged actions are required for improving economy. Inflation is required to be harnessed through stringent control measures by local administrations. Regional trade opportunities shall be discovered for essential commodities on barter trade basis. It will assist in increasing foreign reserves (Chaudhry, 2024). Small and medium enterprises should be encouraged by giving easy loans especially in IT, textiles and microfinance sectors. Forum of SIFC should also incorporate small local investors in overall umbrella to strengthen economic base of country

Third, efforts should be made to run Gwadar Port on maximum capacity of commercial traffic, with mandatory job share for locals. Peace in the region should be ensured through security measures as well as dialogue. Border markets with Iran should be expanded and capitalized upon to create jobs for locals. Special Economic Zones should cater

for locals and a source of economic prosperity rather than burden. SIFC should hold seminars and workshops within Pakistan and outside to give awareness to people about its role and achievements (Syed, 2024).

Fourth, the office of national security adviser should be reinvigorated for coordinated response towards security challenges. For internal security, reforms should be introduced in NACTA wherein it should be empowered to introduce positive changes in police and criminal justice system (Maqsood,2024). Legislations should be done to tailor existing criminal laws on modern lines while keeping religious teachings at forefront. NSA along with MOI should be on lead role for suggesting various options for final approval from National Security Committee

Finally, a comprehensive review of foreign policy should be undertaken duly incorporating evolving global and regional geopolitics challenges and opportunities. It should revolve around balancing relations with major powers, neighbours and economic stalwarts. International enterprises are having more resources than countries with decision power with single individual or a group of people (Hussain, 2023). Foreign Ministry's economic strand should also be tasked to engage those. Input from academia and think tanks is sought by foreign ministry, however, establishment of a task force for a fixed period with detailed could be constituted within the foreign ministry to propose implementable policy options within three months(Chaudry,2024)..

4.9 Pakistan's Efforts to Resolve Emerging Rivalry

Pakistan shall endeavour to act as a mediator to improve ties between US and China as done during Richard Nixon's Presidency. As per Dr. Asghar Ali, Pakistan has made efforts to keep a balance between Pak-US-China relationship trio, while trying to bring normalcy in relations. In 2022, during a visit to China, PM Imran Khan also said that Pakistan is ready to play an 'instrumental role' in normalizing the relations between the US and China. He also hinted on several international forums about threat of total war arising US-China rivalry. During his talk with Reuters in June 2022, he stated Pakistan's preference to help bridge the tensions between China and the US, instead of aligning with a single power and getting trapped(Ahsan, 2021) On the other hand, side lines of OIC Conference in March 2022, while meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister, PM Khan praised China a seasoned friend and offered arbitration between China & US (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Similar statements were given by next Government officials including youngest former FM Bilawal about Sino-US conflict mitigation, thus reflecting consistency in policy stance. COAS General Bajwa also declared US as best strategic partner of Pakistan and China as an all-weather friend with a desire to expand its relations with both states. (Bajwa, 2022). He also indicated of hedging policy in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart General Zhang Youxia by mentioning that US has best weapons while and all economic ventures of Pakistan are with China (KARTHA, 2022). Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif also mentioned, "We wish to engage positively and constructively to endorse the mutual interests of progress, stability, and peace in the South Asian Region with the United States." He desired to mend relationship barriers through diplomacy as a priority (Syed, 2022). In his Nov 2022 visit to China, PM Sharif affirmed enduring friendship and cooperation between both countries. In light of above-mentioned statements, it is clear that Pakistan has always tried to have a balanced approach by giving positive gestures to both powers. However, this policy may not be successful in mid to long term given the plummeting graph of US-China relationship. Therefore, it is imperative that Pakistan plays a more proactive role in bringing both countries towards a meaningful dialogue (Ahsan, 2021).

Pakistan, while managing relations with regional and extra-regional countries should keep on adopting a balanced approach in maintaining relations with US & China as it cannot bank on single power as was the case in past. A closer relationship paradox with China and Russia is likely to reduce alliance between China, Russia and Pakistan can reduce US influence in the region. Pakistan must maintain good relations with ASEAN and SCO member countries.

In navigating the emerging great power rivalry between the United States and China, Pakistan finds itself at a critical juncture where balancing its relationships with both powers is imperative. The country's strategic geopolitical location, historical ties with both nations, and the significance of initiatives like CPEC underscore the importance of this delicate balance. While Pakistan's alignment with China offers economic and military benefits, maintaining strong ties with the US is crucial for economic stability and security. Pakistan must continue to adopt a hedging strategy, carefully managing its foreign relations to avoid over-reliance on either power while seeking to mediate tensions where possible. Domestically, political stability and economic reforms are essential to strengthen Pakistan's position in the global arena, ensuring that it can navigate this complex geopolitical landscape effectively.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Conclusion

According to John Mearsheimer, great powers possess competitive and dominative tendencies. Great power rivalry still continues in the post-Cold War world. The anarchic international system causes a security dilemma among states, leading them to act towards each other. They prevent each other from gaining power and dominance. Moreover, great powers are not assuaged with status quo; instead they seek power maximization and hegemony. In the current era, U.S-China, Pakistan-China and U.S-India relations possess complexities with both differences and similarities. These complexities provide Pakistan with opportunities to acclimate its strategy to leverage the multifaceted situation in its own interests. It is in Pakistan's interest to pursue a smart balanced foreign policy not completely leaning towards any great power, to tackle and focus on non-traditional security threats, and favour peace in South Asia. Leaning too much towards one great power will upset the opposing rising power, causing harm to Pakistan's national interests, which are highly dependent on U.S. and China (Modebadze, 2020).

Great powers aim to achieve political and strategic goals by exerting influence and controlling the world's geography. More powers are rising to gain power and ensure their interests. Domains of competition and cooperation are broadening. World has become highly integrated due to interdependence by means of technology, information flows, capital flows, and people. Countries ensure their strategic benefits through cooperation on common challenges such as technological, environmental, and economic issues. States are increasingly reliant on their neighboring countries and the global community to maximize their national interests. Trade wars, as the history of the world economy shows, have no winners. In a trade war, no one is victorious. Both trade war players and surrounding actors suffer losses. The USA has a record of successful trade agreements and exercising pressure on other countries. China has also exhibited its negotiation prowess, addressing bilateral trade imbalances worth \$200 billion. China has also disclosed its local market to US companies. Nonetheless, sanctions imposed by the US on Chinese trade practices have damaged the Made in China 2025 initiative. The US is not going to stop China from gaining dominance in high-tech areas. Since the start of trade wars in 2018, issues have remained unresolved between the two superpowers. Effective diplomacy and joint efforts are required to resolve the problems. This would ease uncertainty among international actors. The geopolitical rivalry between

major global powers has been rising for many years. Even though the globalized world system promises win-win outcomes for countries, great powers are reverting to zero-sum games, leading to a neo-Cold War era. They are prioritizing their pursuits and dominance. Their foreign policy approach clearly reflects their competitiveness and priorities (Nazmul & Eymen, 2021). Our strategic relationship with China is necessary but insufficient to address our economic and security challenges. We also need the US, an important bilateral economic partner that has traditionally been a valuable security provider. It is necessary for Pakistan to strengthen economic and strategic partnership with China but Pakistan also need US which is important economic export market and traditional security provider. Although the US is an unreliable option for Pakistan, but it must not be alienated as few alternatives are available for Pakistan in terms of securing national interests and also US can harm the country through India to achieve its desired outcomes in emerging Asia geopolitics (Hussain, 2023).

The BRI flagship project, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has amplified relations between Pakistan and China, making them important Asian partners. CPEC's implementation has also increased worrisome debates about posing huge debts on Pakistan. It is debated China is utilizing debt-trap diplomacy to gain economic and strategic leverage. China has become the largest creditor for Pakistan. In 2013, Pakistan owed about 9% of its debt to China but by 2021, debt has immensely increased to 27.4% according to IMF (Younus, 2021).

Currently, Pakistan faces increased challenges in maintaining balanced geopolitics amidst the Russia-Ukraine war, unprecedented Israel escalation in Gaza, and Pakistan's crippling economy. Pakistan's fragile economic condition prompts it to seek financial assistance from countries like China, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. In order to secure this, meeting IMF requirements is necessary, where U.S. influence is huge (Aazim 2023).

Pakistan is facing unprecedented issues including high inflation, domestic issues, internal security threats, political instability, a deteriorating economy and increasing debts. The new government of PM Shebaz Sharif must be facing immense challenges in balancing relations and strengthening strategic autonomy amid an escalating great power rivalry. Pakistan and U.S. relations are faltering, especially after the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. Despite the downward spiral in relations, the US remains largest market for Pakistan's exports. Also, approval of IMF loans and assistance is crucial for

Pakistan, and the US has huge influence in this. The new government is looking for an improvement in the relations, as it is necessary for economic growth.

Pakistan also needs to secure good relations with China, as it seeks military assistance for its defence interests. Moreover, the new government needs additional investment for quick culmination of CPEC's second phase. Deepening US-China cooperation also requires strong security and defence ties with China. To maintain sustainable relations with Iran and Afghanistan, China's diplomatic role is also important. However, it is crucial for Pakistan to balance relations with both the US and China to ensure its interests. The country must avoid complete alignment towards one side (Noor, 2024). A comprehensive review of foreign policy should be undertaken duly incorporating evolving global and regional geopolitics challenges and opportunities. It should revolve around balancing relations with major powers, neighbours and economic stalwarts (Chaudhry, 2024).

A national dialogue must be organized, involving different political parties, the judiciary, economic stakeholders, the military, religious groups, and civil bureaucracy, to devise solutions for key solutions such as terrorism, economic deterioration, political instability, education, etc. Trade should be expanded with various regional partners. CPEC's second phase must be reinvigorated at a faster pace, and it must benefit locals through jobs, expand regional trade, and promote regional stability. It is imperative for Pakistan's government to effectively utilize the Special Investment Facilitation Centre, boosting the country's economic condition (Chaudhry, 2024).

Thus, effective pursuance of strategic hedging in a rising and complicated global and regional environment is necessary and beneficial for Pakistan's geopolitics, serving its political, strategic, economic, and security interests.

5.2 Recommendations

Following recommendations should be implemented to balance relations with US and China:-

a) Pakistan can learn valuable lessons from the alignment choices being made by smaller Southeast and South Asian states. Hedging provides options for overcoming the hazard of entrapment, the peril of abandonment and the liability of corresponding domestic friction accompanying increased dependence on a hegemon. However, the space for hedging

may shrink if Pakistan is unable to get its own house in order. It is only then that Pakistan will be able to use hedging to untap its geostrategic potential rather than remaining an elite-captured state operating in a clientalist fashion (Muhammad, 2024).

b) Instead of selecting sides Pakistan should keep country's national interests in forefront while formulating policy about relationship with US and China. In this regard, her foreign policy may be guided through the prism of contesting nations' approach towards US-China relationship. Pakistan may use engagement and disengagement strategy in line with global/ regional environment (Maqsood, 2024)..

c) While dealing with the US-China, Pakistan must keep public opinion at forefront and same be communicated to both countries, especially US. Pakistan's focus should be improvement of economy through trade and investment from both countries while ensuring national cohesion and stabilizing internal security. It should create awareness among masses about the need of keeping national interests at forefront instead of emotional sentiments (Maqsood, 2024).

d) On the other hand, independent foreign policy is inversely proportional to the amount of foreign dependence for which Pakistan has to come out of IMF trap by improving her economic and technological capacity. Pakistan must maintain a strategic partnership and relations with China amid Indo-US burgeoning partnership; however, at the same time it must collaborate with US especially on trade and technological advancements.

e) Pakistan shall endeavour to act as a mediator to improve ties between US and China.

The December 2023 visit of Army Chief Gen Asim Munir to the US laid a foundational pathway for the future direction of this bilateral relationship. This visit, which came at a pivotal moment, established a consensus between the Biden administration and Pakistan on key areas of cooperation, particularly in security and regional stability. The new government, therefore, inherits a mantle that requires both the continuation and expansion of this dialogue, especially in areas of security cooperation and intelligence sharing. This cooperation is essential, not just for the bilateral relationship but for broader regional stability, including counter-terrorism efforts (Syed 2024). Another cornerstone of this evolving relationship is economic cooperation and support, especially given Pakistan's current economic crisis. As far as US is concerned, Pakistan should collaborate with it on

local security, exchange and examination in science and innovation. Due to US influence on United Nations and IMF, Pakistan must be careful while interacting on such forums (Anwar, 2020).

The Afghan refugee crisis presents a humanitarian challenge that further intertwines the interests of Pakistan and US. The repatriation of Afghan refugees and the expedited processing of those bound for the US and other Western countries remain crucial issues. Addressing this crisis effectively calls for collaborative efforts that consider the humanitarian implications and the potential impact on regional stability (Gluck,2023).

With regards to China, completion of CPEC initiatives is essential to harvest complete benefits and save on money by covering up for loans taken to finance these by accelerating revenue generation activities which are slow and not going as planned. Pakistan and China must focus on rejuvenating CPEC and enticing Chinese investment into Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Regionally, the government must work with Beijing to mitigate Islamabad-Kabul tensions, besides addressing the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ irritant in Pak-Iran relations(Inkster, 2020).Former ambassador to China Masood Khalid, concurs with this approach, saying, “We should solidify our relations with China.” He also believes that Pakistan needs to work with “China and Russia for stability in Afghanistan.”(Lodhi, 2024).

Financial security can also be gained by incorporating other stakeholders in CPEC/ BRI like Iran and Russia. This will leverage Pakistan to further enhance trade and keeping options alive when things go south. Pakistan also needs to improve existing infrastructure to improve capacity of system to handle all the potential investments; SIFC being a step in this stride. So far Pakistan has not been able to attract foreign investments which could cater for depleting reserves and high debt to GDP ratio (Anwar, 2020). . Thus to attract and manage investments, improvement of infrastructure is imperative. Divergence on issue of Xiangiang and suppression of Muslims in China has the potential of severing ties between both countries. Besides ties with US/ China, strengthening relations with neighbouring countries, Arab world CARs and Russia is also imperative for Pakistan.

Balancing domestic concerns over Indian-administered Kashmir with the potential advantages of a less adversarial relationship with India is essential. Renewing dialogue and confidence-building initiatives with New Delhi, upholding ceasefire agreements, and exploring avenues for economic collaboration could help reduce tensions and create a

foundation for more constructive engagement between the two nations. Ambassador Basit favours a cautious approach on India. “Instead of getting impatient and directly engaging the new government in India, Pakistan should start by Track-II diplomacy to figure out Delhi’s strategic intent on Jammu and Kashmir and get an idea about its thinking on stalemate in ties. If Pakistan goes back to structured dialogue, its position on Kashmir would be undermined. Pakistan should have clear red lines about ties with India,” he maintained(Syed, 2024).

In addition to managing key relationships, the new government will need to allocate significant foreign policy resources to strengthening ties with Arab states, redefining its relationship with Iran, and navigating the complexities of a Taliban-led Afghanistan. Engaging with the Arab world should extend beyond mere diplomatic gestures and be treated as a strategic priority. This approach is crucial not only for the economic advantages these relationships offer but also for their potential in promoting regional peace and stability(Tanija,2024). The Gulf nations, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and Qatar, have become vital players in Pakistan’s economic development. Their financial support and investments have played a key role in sustaining and enhancing Pakistan's economy.

5.3 Findings

- The rise of China has transformed the power structure in the Asia-Pacific, which has influenced both the US and its regional allies. China's growth, both in terms of economy, diplomacy and military, has caused the disputes over the resources and the increase of the security issues. This creates a difficulty for the United States to maintain its influence in the area
- In order to undermine China’s increasing technological, economic and diplomatic outreach, the US has implemented a disruption strategy encompassing various actions, procedures, and tactics to counter potential threats and risks to the state’s national security by emerging rivals.
- The trade deficit of the US with China is a major cause of the trade war. The trade war is also fuelled by the United States perceiving China as a potential threat to its international image and global hegemony. On the technological front, the US views China's technological advances, particularly in the areas of artificial intelligence, 5G wireless networks, and artificial intelligence as a strategic risk.

- Pakistan would be caught in the middle of two great powers leading to security implications at the regional and global level. Balancing relations with both U.S. and China appears to be a very daunting undertaking for Pakistan.
- The economic rivalry between the U.S. and China places Pakistan in a struggling position, as both great powers are significant trading partners for Pakistan
- U.S. political analysts consider CPEC as one of the main reason for constraints in U.S.-Pakistan declining relations.
- It is crucial for Pakistan to balance relations with both the US and China to ensure its interests. The country must avoid complete alignment towards one side.

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