

US-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Implications for Pakistan



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Abstract: *The US-China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific theatre has deepened and reimposed structural shifts in the region's geopolitics. This paper analyse the impact of this rivalry to Pakistan since it is an interested party due to its geopolitical position and current relations with China by way of CPEC. The work focuses on the Pakistan's position between China on the one side and the relatively full-spectrum relationship with the US on the other and their economic, military and diplomatic implications. Therefore, the research will aim at evaluating the new pattern in the changing security structure of Indo-Pacific and capacity of Pakistan to manage and cooperate with different countries' interest. Thus, the policy analysis, interviews with the experts, as well as case studies were applied to reveal the general tendencies of geopolitical shifts in this sphere. The study reveals that for Pakistan there are risks as well as opportunities because the competition between the US and China may influence its economic growth, security cooperation and role in the region in view of escalating tensions in South Asia.*

Keywords: US, China, Indo-Pacific, Strategic Rivalry, Cooperation

Introduction

The United States and China have been in strategic rivalry for a long in the Indo-Pacific. It is important to put attention to the factors influencing current and upcoming confrontation between the two leading global powers United States and China in the contest over the assertion of influence in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a large area involving a very sensitive web of countries, sea-lanes and importantly, economic powerhouses (Kwun-Sun Lau, 2023). Thus, the political and economical interests, goals, and objectives of the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific did describe further strategies of both nations in the political and economical sphere while focusing on historical partnerships, naval powers and territorial demands in the region as well as the ambitions of becoming the dominant power in this part of the world.

The United States as a long-term player in the region has always aimed for stability and preserving of international law in the Indo-Pacific region. This entails free flow of navigation, economic well being and partnering with friendly nations in terms of security in the region (Aoi, 2024). China, during the same period has been rather assertive of its ambitions to gain greater control over the region and flex its muscles in the Indian Pacific Ocean region. The Belt and Road Initiative also reflects on China's appetite for linkages to grow economically in the region, which offers infrastructure developments for connections and commerce. At the same time, China, with a fast growing navy, has staked an interest in the South China Sea as a part of a greater claim to domination.

China's strategic aims in the Indo-Pacific Region are not only narrow and confined to economics and force building but are comprehensive which include diplomacy and building of the norms of the new order in accordance with the PRC's vision of the multipolar world (Josukutty & Lobo, 2024). The nature of this competition will therefore, remain dynamic, resolved through the interaction of legacy factors, current problems, as well as, national strategic choices as both countries seek the upper hand in the region (Vučetić, 2022). In the past, the sprouting of great powers has always been tail gated by conflict as the challenger extends her political control, adopts security objectives, and engages in economic activities in an attempt to bring about increased strategic power. However, the reaction of the other states to emergence, control and response strategies determine the direction and magnitude of conflict. China has been very careful to stay away from common traps characteristic of a rising great power in exhibiting and responding to perceptions (Türker, 2024). Conflict is not sure or nearby but something happened in Beijing that global policy-makers and business strategists cannot turn a blind eye on (Nagy, 2023).

The Indo-Pacific region is considered home to the world's several most important sea lanes through which a major segment of world trade passes. It is also rich in natural resources and has a rapidly growing consumer market. This rivalry in the region holds significant ramifications for Pakistan in terms of its foreign policy, security, and economy. Pakistan is located at the region's crossroads and has robust ties with the US and China. This research aims

to examine the involvement of major powers in Asia and the competitive dynamics present in the region of Asia-Pacific, which has ultimate impacts on regional stability and security. Specifically, the research will focus on the power struggle between the United States and China and identify key indicators and variables that impact Pakistan's foreign policy, economic interests, and domestic and regional security, particularly concerning the escalating economic

and trade

disputes between the US and China. As competition for influence and control in the region intensifies, Pakistan may face the challenge of balancing its relationships with the US and China and navigating the competing interests in the region to protect its national interests and security.

Literature Review

Lot of works have been done previously pose a number of differing views about the US- China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. Realists who assert about such inevitable laws of nature interesting occasional do or die for the act of survival and power politics. On the other hand, liberals say this mainly for the reasons including, harmonizing and moderating capability of three interrelated and synergistic reinforce causal trinkets; spreading of democracy and use of international institutions and economic interdependence. John J. Mearsheimer, while describing the imperial temptation as the desire for great powers to dominate the region of the declining hegemonic power asserts that while approaches that regard hegemonic designs as end goals are always on the lookout for an opportunity to acquire power (Mearsheimer, 2010). However, both realist and liberals have accepted the factual fact of rising. There was overall consensus about the nature of change in China with regards to US-China positions as to the question of whether china will be able to replace US in international politics or not.

Fong (2022) argues that the US and China are in competition for regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, and this rivalry stems from their respective desires for security and influence. The US seeks to maintain its dominant position in the region, whereas China aims to overtake the US and become an influential power. Stromseth (2019) describes that South East Asian countries are facing a dilemma regarding the growing influence of China in the Indo-Pacific region. Turner and Parmar (2020) discuss the US relations with key Indo-Pacific states,

multilateral institutions, and important issues. The US aimed to establish an American Pacific

for global hegemony, but most regional governments prefer a plurality of power and most of Asian economy currently trades with China more than any other state. Hu (2020) analyses that in the twenty-first century, China will remain the principal contender of the US among the big powers.

To compete with China, the US administration is using a whole-of-government approach and taking tough measures to counter China's threat to the United States' economic interests, values, and security.

S Prabhakar (2022) has view point that due to China's growing naval capabilities and assertive foreign policy, regional nations are seeking stronger security cooperation with the US, resultantly, US-China strategic competition has converted as a key element of the Indo-Pacific region's regional dynamics. Medcalf (2022) argues that the phrase "Indo-Pacific" emphasizes the relationship between the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well as the expanding influence of China and India. China's rising has been highlighted by the Belt and Road Initiative's Maritime Silk Road, which has caused the US and its allies to concentrate on the Indo-Pacific. Bhattarai (2022) describes that the greater strategic confrontation between US and China depends on the Asia-

Pacific region. Some of the World's fastest-growing economies are in this region and act as a key node for energy and trade movements internationally. Liu and Jamali (2021) argue that Pakistan's rising allegiance to China may have consequences for the overall regional balance of power, particularly if China's influence in the region continues to expand, as it is motivated in part by a desire to balance India's expanding strategic connections with the US. Wei and Zhang (2021) give a thorough analysis of the effects of China-US rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region, with special attention on regional security, increased unrest and tension, which might have far-reaching effects on region.

Roy (2020) discusses that the US-China competition is fuelled by a variety of causes, such as military might, economic clout, and ideological differences. Singh and Marwah

(2022) analyse the US-China geopolitical rivalry has boosted US commitment to the Indo-Pacific area while also exposing it to new risks, particularly in the economic and technological spheres.

Auslin (2020) analyses in his book that the Indo-Pacific area is becoming a more significant and prominent geopolitical region of the world. Siddiqi (2022) analyses that Pakistan is currently experiencing a geopolitical crisis as US-China competition on the global front is rapidly growing up. Xing and Bernal-Meza (2022) evaluate that China has just started to change the conventional world's economic order, and it has plans to increase its influence in key areas. Shaukat, Bakht, and Sciences (2022) describe those geopolitical considerations that motivate the US government's promotion of the Indo-Pacific idea. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Belt and Road Initiative are two symbols of regional cooperation initiatives.

Research Methodology

This research includes a qualitative approach to explore the trends of the US-China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region and implications for Pakistan. Qualitative research will be used in the study while collecting data through the use of existing literature, policy analysis, and experts interviews to assess the political, economic, security, and geopolitical influence on Pakistan's foreign policy. To analyse the trends and background information on the US and China's stance in the Indo-Pacific and Pakistan's role in-between, secondary data in the form of academic articles, government documents and reports from normative think tanks will be used. Concepts of interest include US 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', and China's Belt and Road Initiative BRI, documents will be examined to highlight each country's strategic objectives and how Pakistan fits into plans significantly through CPEC.

Apart from this, official documents and Declarations from the US, China and Pakistan will also be involved in policy analysis in order to determine the strategies with which this country balances between these two powers. In

order to better understand this issue, the author is going to provide the comparative analysis of the new type of relations, which exist between

Pakistan and China and the traditional type of relations, which existed between Pakistan and US. That is where this analysis will attempt to draw such change and possible threats as Pakistan continues to lean towards China and how the growing defence cooperation between the US and India is likely to shape Pakistan's strategic environment.

The interviews of experts will cover Pakistan's strategic calculations as to how they approach the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific rivalry with special reference to Pakistan- US-China triangle. The finding from semi structured interviews will then be elaborated with a secondary source to make sure the perception of Pakistan's geopolitical position amidst with the relations competition of the US and China are fully understood.

Theoretical Framework

To underpin this study about the US-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Implications for Pakistan, this research employs Realism theory and Complex Interdependence. Realism, parasitic to state self-interests and security competition paints a direction for the competitive behaviours of the US and China in the Indo-Pacific region. From the realism's point of view both China and the USA are primarily concerned with military and economic power and are struggling to achieve hegemony in Asia (Miller & Rubinovitz, 2020). For Pakistan Realism underscores its reality to manage this competition by building with China an economic partnership through CPEC and keeping a balance with complex security partnership with USA for its security requirement and strategic independence.

On the other hand, Complex Interdependence, which is derived from neoliberal institutionalism, claims that the states are linked in the global political economy and there are numerous paths of contacts except for military balance (Keohane & Nye Jr, 2000). Therefore

Complex interdependence is in contrast with

Realism's focus on power battles as the US, China, and Pakistan are involved in commerce, investment, and international organizations. The increasing interdependence is evidentially seen with Pakistan's involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative where economic relations with China provides development benefits, whereas Pakistan knows the importance of continuing the relation with US for international economical stability and diplomacy.

This research synthesizes Realism as an assumption that the Indo-Pacific nations are in a security competition whereas Complex Interdependence as an assumption that these nations are economically integrated (Singai, Dixit, & Reddy, 2023). It offers a more complex way to explain how and why is Pakistan dealing with its foreign policy amid security rivalry and more importantly economic vulnerability to regional powerhouse in this strategically important and sensitive area.

US's Strategic Interests in the Indo-Pacific Region

President of the United States, Joe Biden stated while addressing to leaders at the QUAD Summit in September 2021 that the fate of each of our nations, and the world, rests on the Indo-Pacific's continued freedom and prosperity in the future years (Hornung, 2023). The United States Indo-Pacific Strategy released in February 2022 is centred on the US position and imperative in the area stating that the United States has long understood that the Indo-Pacific is critical to our security and our resilience (Novotný & Potočník, 2023). America's relationship with Asia began through trading partnership slightly over two centuries ago and was complimented through immigration. Subsequent to the second world war the United States found out that the stability of Asia was central to the security of America. In response it reaffirmed its security engagement with the region through security treaties with Australia, Japan, South Korea,

Philippines and Thailand with the aim of promoting democracy and regional security (Mohan & Singh, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Biden administration has

spent nearly four years of his presidency managing the US government while it is very much evident that the US has prioritized and invited their allies in the Indo-Pacific which shows their inclination, given the importance of the region, the Indo-Pacific (Barbantan, 2024).

Mr Donald Trump, President of the US had withdrawn his country from the TPP trade deal in 2017. This withdrawal was the main turbulence to the long term leadership of the US in the Asia-Pacific region (Strating, 2022). The very surprise moves in the region must have set roots of distrust regarding the future course of US involvement in the region. Thus, in the new period after the end of the Cold War, US-China relations remain unpredictable because of three major issues, security factor, human rights abuse and trade. Such security concerns that emerged in the early 1990s appear to be centre to what has provoked the entire spectrum of relations between the two states. Notably, the US thinks China is a sole competitor and thus, this divergence of interests is more apparent. From this one can clearly deduce that both China and the US were not shy in actively pursuing their interests in the matter of security in the region. They must, however, accustom themselves with the changing security, economic and political environments of the region (Leoni, 2024). Before the tragic incident of 9/11, the US strategy was defined to achieve three main goals in the region, firstly to contain balance of power, secondly to protect US economic interests and thirdly to overpower human rights and democratic values. After 9/11, the US added two new goals to its policy which were firstly to dismantle terrorists and secondly to stop spread of nuclear weapons. This means that for some time now the importance has been placed immensely high because one can find the beating of the war at any given time. India might also like to play an aggressive role against the increasing power of China by extending the footprints of US. To support this idea, both India and Japan recently conducted a naval exercise with an aim to help in attaining the status of global power. India and the US currently have a strategic partnership which is manifested from concerns of mutual interest and even the

democratic principles (Katz, 2023). The strategic relations between India and the US has been strengthen due to rise of china. India and the US have common strategic security and the latter's economic interests as the former seeks the backing of the US in its bid to become a permanent member of the UNSC (Muni, 2024). The Malacca Strait has become one of the busiest channels, and it plays its part in regulating almost all the trades of the world. All states have interests vested in this zone and this means that the US will never wish to convert this zone into a war zone. Low-level competition between the US-China relationship and on US supplying military equipment will remain prevalent within the region specifically in Vietnam, Philippines as well as Singapore.

Chinese Interests in the Indo-Pacific and Foreign Policy in Post-Cold War Era

In 1989 due to the Tiananmen square incident most of the states of the world moved to sanction China to remember Chinese students' rebellion. To overcome this isolation, China embarked on undertaking various measures, which at first targeted on diplomatic recovery of capitals and then stabilizing the peripheral areas. The specific China's actions involved in a number of efforts aimed at increasing global reputation and its security and economic benefits (Alexiou, 2024). China took the proactive role in advancing the bilateral relations with the regional states through ASEAN in 1990. Furthermore, China also took some accommodating stances on other sensitive regional issues in the following years; it shows not only China's bargaining power, but also its willingness to subordinate personal interest for the common regional interest; the actions include its standing on the issue of managing the sovereignty of Spratly Island and its handling Taiwan issue (Leoni, 2024). Finally, on the collapse of the Soviet Union, China had the opportunity on official levels to approach the new emerging independent republics. Chinese diplomacy was made relevant to be for the benefit and cohesiveness of nearby nations. China was keen on managing the solidarity with other developing countries, about

which it was always keen to project; to, on face

value, address one of the many issues or imperatives inherent in the idea of a great power rise.

China's Assertive Role in the Region and Global Affairs Vis-a-Vis World Response

China is playing assertive role in global affairs. Some of its proactive activities include interaction with North Korean nuclear talks, the Iranian nuclear matter, as well as the Darfur contest. North Korea counterpart of China had for long been seen as strong ally then used her massive amplitude to compel North Korea to the negotiation table. In this regard, Beijing not only provided the venue for Six-Part Talks, but also persisted with the effort to achieve the common and mutually satisfactory peaceful resolution (Sciorati, 2024). China has been trying its level best to meet up to the international standards set even in some friendship rights. Xi Jinping meeting with President Biden to talk about the bilateral relationships including the Ukraine-Russia Conflict. All such actions have been done to assure the international community that China has a stand on how it wants a moderate peaceful and constructive approach towards world affairs. During July 2007 when China was chairing the Security Council it supported resolution 1769 where by a force of 26000 inspired peace keepers from Africa and UN to calm down conflict in western Darfur. Chinese's efforts on proactive engagement on major issues elicited concern from the international community including, states and organizations alike accusing China of lack of political will, lack of real concern and conflicting interests. These criticisms are unmindful of China's situation and at least some of the allegations are actually self-serving if one bears in mind that every state is entitled to defend sovereignty and protect its interest where necessary, including if this is against the UN Charter and other international norms and standards (Cohen & Kisling, 2024). This argument stands good and equally applies to critics of Chinese foreign policy; many argue that Chinese diplomacy is only reactive on world issues that have direct consequences to its territorial rights and integrity, citing such examples as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and the Diaoyu islands and other

major and minor disputes in South China Sea etc (Singh & Marwah, 2023).

US-China Rivalry and Its Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan's strategic thinkers are not blind to the existing and possibly worsening US- China tension, they do not underestimate the significant that it possesses the ability to settle in the relationship that Pakistan shares with both nations. However, regarding how the emerging American-China 'superpower' competition will shape the nature of the relations between Islamabad and Washington and what this might portend for strategic stability in the South Asian sub-continent (Khan, 2022).

Pakistan adopted good and strategic ties with both US and China with regards to Security, Political and Economic cooperation previously but the main strategic building blocks of Pakistan-US partnership are based on the continued support of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, which would be needed beyond the military's withdrawal. If military and economic help has slow down, however, Pakistan continues to provide American products a ready outlet for Pakistani products, and Pakistani students who could afford to study abroad specially in American universities (Sajjad, Farid, & Wadood, 2024). On the other hand, it has assumed the status of arms supplier to Pakistan and has engaged in unprecedented economic interaction through CPEC worth \$62 billion estimate from China. Pakistani strategists also rely on China to get steady support in order to deter asymmetric threat India and moral support to globalize the problem of Kashmir whereas, US does not provide support and it is high time that the Pakistani policy makers tread carefully in their bilateral relationship dynamics with both these strategically important countries and not get entangled into taking sides (Zulfqar, 2024).

Pakistani officials have chosen at this initial and somewhat precarious phase when hostility and animosity may rub shoulders with efforts to negotiate a mutually acceptable trade arrangement between the two large trading partners . Pakistan has aspirations to get back to

the level of a bridge state remembering the time when Pakistan found itself in the middle of the thaw between the US and China in the Nixon era (Jamali, Hussain, & Liu, 2024). Certain policy makers envision Pakistan as a neutral player that could intermediate between two superpowers to reduce tensions as well as become a place where US and Chinese interests overlapped to foster development for the region including in Afghanistan.

Pakistan would simultaneously be able to ensure security and economic benefits which is attached with maintaining free and fair working along side with the two super powers of the world without becoming more or less totally reliant on any of the two power's assistance. The US-Pakistan bilateral relationship which is hardly stable, such pressure is better off avoided. The dynamics of the emerging great power rivalry between the United States and China will present several threats to Pakistan's best efforts to preserve its strategic partnership with China and friendly relations with the Biden administration (Sajjad et al., 2024).

The evolving cooperation between Pakistan and China, the military and defence ties between two countries are becoming stronger while the Pakistani economy increasingly depends on China through CPEC that is a crucial part of Chinese BRI plan (Shahzad & Sunawar, 2023). Establishment of CPEC was described by Pakistani Prime Minister "as a manifestation of Pakistan-China friendship," adding that "the government will complete it at any cost" On the same note, a Chinese Foreign Office spokesperson described CPEC as "an important pilot project of BRI cooperation and a flagship for bilateral cooperation. The Officials in the US have been expressing a lot of negativity towards CPEC and future effects stating that this infrastructure would escalate costs due to its lack of transparency and lead to nothing but corruption that would pile more debt to Pakistan's head who has been borrowing from China.

The United States to compete with China on infrastructure financing in Pakistan is also lacking as well as not willing to pay for

irresponsible lending. Washington cannot be blamed for showing concern over the state of Pakistan's economy with its slow growth, poor commitment to raise revenues and difficulty in promoting exports. Therefore, while Pakistan has increasingly come to rely on Chinese financial support it has not been entirely passive when facing its largest benefactor. Even the concept of having a deep seaport at Gwadar was originally Pakistan's idea and not China's plan to advance its "string of pearls" strategy of acquiring a control over key ports around the Indian Ocean (Shahzad & Sunawar, 2023). It is high time for Pakistan to balance out her relations with her perceivers like US and China and other regional powers and should take measures to maintain their bilateral relations with all countries on the principle of mutual trust and parity (Mangi, 2024).

US-China Rivalry: A Dilemma for South East Asia's Regional Stability

The emergent bipolar US-China relations are not only defining opportunities and challenges inside the Pakistan state but also shaping the nature of Pakistan's relations with the other strategic actors in the region. This changing India-US relationship in the context of containing China in the region has not escaped Pakistani notice and clearly, Pakistan is not without stakes in this emerging combination. US-China rivalry could more intensify a prolonged India-Pakistan conflict by escalating advanced arms and intelligence equipment on both parties, to the contrary, US and Chinese joint effort regarding escalating crises could be hampered (Zulfqar, 2024).

New tensions between India, China and Pakistan has been sparked off due to the scrapping of the special status of Kashmir and Ladakh by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the month of August in 2019 (Hussain & Ali Naqvi, 2024). China's continuing stand-off with India in eastern Ladakh gives Pakistan the chance to regain some of the ground lost to India in the past decade. This opportunity has, however, increased India's worst nightmare of a two front war where it has to contend with defence along its borders with China on one side and Pakistan on the other. Although it is improbable these

threat perceptions could exacerbate the currently tense relations between India and Pakistan (Jacob, 2024).

The US political strategists have identified the possible ways in which Washington may step up and expand the cooperation with New Delhi within the framework of the novel Indo- Chinese border conflict. However, although New Delhi may be growing more assertive in its fundamental desire to curb China's influence, its ability to do so appears to be flagging. The Indo-Pacific strategy, on which Indo-US cooperation mainly focuses on maritime aspects, is to be further adapted to address the China-related continental concerns of India, than, it could have potential significant implications for Pakistan. Even as drastic change may not be expected at this juncture, assertion made in the wake of the October US-India 2+2 Dialogue relating to US intentions of providing geospatial intelligence and advanced missile technologies to India have worried Pakistan. Pakistan's Foreign Office had openly called for alarm over a multi-billion dollar military deal signed during US President Donald Trump's visit to India in February 2020-26 (Bano, 2023; Khizar & Hassan, 2024).

Pakistan's strategic thinkers are likely to go for the improvement of its conventional and nuclear arsenal, both offence and defence, because the use of proxies has implications at home and abroad and Pakistan can never be sure of not getting sanctions. Thus, deterring stability has remained intact so far notwithstanding low level wars between India and Pakistan in the recent past but threat of nuclear proliferation is still looming large in this region. The US has been contributing to build the command and control systems of Pakistan and the last Nuclear Security Index recognized the efforts of Pakistan in this direction placing Pakistan on top of the "most improved" list especially in the evident areas of security and control (Gurjar, 2024). In addition to a further deterioration of nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, the renewed tensions between the USA and China leave the possibility for both Washington and Beijing to neglect

their roles as third party mediators in case the conflict between India and Pakistan escalates

again. This competition is likewise influencing Pakistan's interaction with the Middle Eastern countries; the United States and China are the significant powers that shape the regional politics. Pakistan has had some recent past tensions with the traditional US ally Saudi Arabia because of its unwillingness to support Pakistan on issue of Kashmir (Zulfqar, 2024).

Pakistan shifting from UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain and moving into Iran, Turkey, and Malaysia camp is not a strategic over reach for Pakistan. The latter set of countries is all Muslim yet has different stances on many matters including their relations with China and with each other. Instead of having to select one over the other, it will be more beneficial for Pakistan to maintain its strategic flexibility, and continuously balance regional sensitive as it plans to connect CPEC with the broader BRI project so as to diversify its investments (Abbas, Ali, Khan, Farooq, & Ismail, 2024).

Many regional actors are closely observing the situation at the Pakistan's seaport, Gwadar. Even though, there is no substantial proof of Gwadar being converted to a naval or dual use port at the moment but the management of Gwadar seaport was handed over from Singapore to China in Dec, 2013 and Pakistan navy's joint exercise Sea Sparkle with Chinese navy in Arabian Sea has raised doubts in the region (Ahmad, 2023). Pakistan is not likely to accept such an outcome because a Chinese navy in Gwadar will provoke hostility between Pakistan and several Gulf states which host both a US military and naval presence.

The announcement made on January 2019 of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's \$10 billion investment in an oil refinery project in Gwadar probably provides some comfort to the US as Saudi Arabia is an ally country to the US (Mason, 2023) but it could not be matured due to multiple factors including lack of political stability and incidents of terrorism inside the Baluchistan. An expected China-Iran draft trade deal inserts a new dimension of uncertainty in calibrating the region vis-à-vis Pakistan's precarious relations. New \$ 400 billion Iran China deal could far outstrip Indian Iranian relations in the deep sea port of Chabahar. On

their part, Pakistan is balancing between the US and China, thus, the country is not absolutely against

China's deepening influence in Iran as a way towards new markets. Although a probable Chinese endeavor to probe for a similar investment and infrastructure project in Iran can help sever Pakistan's reliance on India (Eslami & Kemie, 2023)."

One area however that intensified US-China competition does not appear to be threatening Pakistan's regional relations is Afghanistan. In fact, Pakistan's security interests in Afghanistan have been primarily shaped by its threats perception from India, and these interests at least until recently, have not been significantly located in the geo-strategically contested US-China rivalry. Indeed, the future of stability of Afghanistan is a subject on which the US and China are likely to find commonality in spite of the competition. However, there is no need to further complicate the situation in Afghanistan by making the US and China rival since China does not want increasing the appearance of the Al-Qaeda or the Islamic States near its borders (Peng & Rahman, 2024; Zulfqar, 2024). Such developments offer a precedent for the economic stabilization of Afghanistan employing existing CPEC facilities. Pakistan would welcome this approach especially should the US and other states gladly commit to related projects in the interest of Afghan connectivity and stability and perhaps alongside, Chinese investment

The Finding of the Study

The study on the US-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Implications for Pakistan" reveals several key findings:

Geopolitical Balancing

In relations to the Pak-China ties, Pakistan faces the problem of accommodating closer economic cooperation with China especially through the CPEC while at the same time preserving strategic partnership with the US. In this way, Pakistan improves its economy partnering with China; however, it cannot forget that with security threats and the need for the international community's support, the US should not be

enemies.

Security Implications

The strategic partnership between the United States of America and India based on the US Indo-Pacific strategy increases the Pakistan's security anxiety that forces it to look towards China for military and diplomatic assistance. This process is leading to the increased security rivalry between Pakistan and India on the regional level.

Economic Dependency

The rising number of Chinese investments and projects under BRI in Pakistan poses economic benefits but at the same time reveal risks of creating more dependence on China that may restrict Islamabad's manoeuvring space in Indo-Pacific contest.

Diplomatic Challenges

This feuds puts Pakistan on a sensitive diplomatic tight rope where it cannot afford to be seen siding either with the Americans or the Chinese and at the same time, the country cannot afford to compromise on the best strategies of achieving its regional security and developmental objectives. Therefore, it can be stated that the Pakistan's position in the framework of the systemic rivalry between the US and China is an even more intricate and sensitive activity of balancing between the economic cooperation with China on the one hand and security relations with the US on the other hand which causes certain consequences for the Pakistan's foreign policy, economy and strategic security vision in the region.

Conclusion

It is interesting to know that Pakistan is balanced right in the middle of the strategic rivalry between United States of America and China with this opportunity and threats for the country. The positioning in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has enhanced the physical and political geography of the strategic importance and alignment with Beijing which has further helped it to become an important actor of geopolitical power game in the larger context of the Indo-Pacific region. Nonetheless, this

cooperation has also started bearing certain problems particularly, dynamics in relation with United States and managing strengths and weaknesses in the context of economic interdependence with China. Through strategic investments in Pakistan, thus China increases pressure in the regional competition-base thus impacts Pakistan as well as its regional and global counterpart. Pakistan must, therefore, develop a dully compound approach in the management of its foreign policy in order to accommodate its relations with these global powers and its internal issues. In this way, by developing multi polarity of its foreign policy, involving itself in the regional processes, and stabilizing internal interpred, Pakistan can strengthen its position and increase its freedom of actions. Such measures will help for Pakistan to have more control over the implications of the competition between two powers of United States and China, build on its strengths and play a part in maintaining stability of the region due to changing dynamics of the international relations.

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40