

# Navigating the Turbulent Waters: An In-Depth Study of US-China Geopolitical Rivalry

Zahoor Ahmad Dar<sup>1</sup> & Shahid Javid<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India

<sup>2</sup> Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of History, University of Annamalai, Tamil Nadu, India

Correspondence: Zahoor Ahmad Dar, Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, 190006, India. E-mail: [zahoordar.psscholar@universityofkashmir.net](mailto:zahoordar.psscholar@universityofkashmir.net)

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## Abstract

This manuscript explores the intricate and multifaceted geopolitical frictions between the United States and the People's Republic of China, which have crystallized as a salient characteristic of contemporary international relations. By scrutinizing the historical antecedents of this rivalry, the discourse elucidates pivotal determinants exacerbating the burgeoning tensions, encompassing trade disputes, military posturing, and a burgeoning technological rivalry. This study endeavours to untangle the intricacies of US-China relations and their ramifications for global equilibrium through a rigorous analysis of diplomatic overtures, space race, and security dilemmas. Furthermore, the paper assesses the agency of regional actors and multilateral institutions in modulating the dynamics of this rivalry. Finally, this study's evaluation aspires to furnish insights into prospective trajectories for conflict resolution and cooperative engagement, underscoring the paramount significance of dialogue and strategic management in navigating the complexities engendered by this critical geopolitical milieu.

**Keywords:** China, USA, defense, economy, rivalry, international, geopolitical

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary international relations discourse, the ascendancy of China as a preeminent geopolitical actor signifies a significant transformation in the global power structure, particularly in juxtaposition to the liberal hegemony promulgated by the United States. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, China has experienced unprecedented economic growth, characterized by a tripling of Gross Domestic Production, which has concomitantly bolstered the legitimacy of its authoritarian political architecture. This phenomenon is often articulated through the lens of "authoritarian resilience," wherein state capacity and economic performance engender a perception of political efficacy that challenges Western normative frameworks of governance. China's geopolitical posture is further complicated by its intricate tapestry of cultural, historical, and economic affiliations with a plethora of states, particularly within the Global South. Such relationships are predicated upon a narrative of non-interference and mutual respect for sovereignty, positioning China's political model as a viable alternative amidst the perceived anarchy of post-Cold War dynamics (Shambaugh, D., 2018). This paradigm shift manifests as an assertion of "soft power," whereby Beijing seeks to cultivate influence through cultural diplomacy and economic investment, notably through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

However, a salient point of contention remains Beijing's ambivalence toward adherence to the established norms of international governance, particularly those articulated in maritime and airspace regulations, as well as the overarching demand for democratization within multilateral frameworks. This reluctance underscores a fundamental divergence from the liberal international order designed primarily by the United States, which advocates for a rules-based approach to global affairs. Critically, the implications of China's ascent challenge the linear narratives of progress and democratization that have dominated Western political thought and necessitate a reevaluation of the theoretical underpinnings of state sovereignty, power dynamics, and international legitimacy in the current geopolitical landscape (Modebadze, V., 2020). In this context, China's emergence as a counter-hegemon amplifies the discourse surrounding global governance and raises pertinent questions about the future of international relations. The intersection of economic prowess, cultural diplomacy, and political ideology positions China as a pivotal actor in shaping a multipolar world order, where diverse and competing frameworks of authority and legitimacy increasingly define the intricacies of global politics.

China's historical trajectory reveals a pronounced transformation as it navigates the complexities of global leadership. This evolution depicts China as potentially emerging as a "chief force" akin to an Iron Chancellor from the African or Asian contexts, reflecting a strategic recalibration in its foreign policy and geopolitical ambitions. However, this transformation is fraught with inherent tensions and contradictions, influenced by historical legacies and domestic pressures. Since the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, the Chinese state has engaged in increasingly autocratic practices to quell dissent, particularly in regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet, where ethnic minorities face systemic repression. The government's actions can be interpreted through the lens of statecraft, where maintaining societal stability is prioritized over individual liberties (Scobell, A., 2021). This approach aims to mitigate the potential for civil unrest stemming from socioeconomic disparities exacerbated by rapid modernization. Simultaneously, China has adopted an assertive stance in the South China Sea, establishing militarized artificial islands that challenge international maritime norms and provoke regional neighbours. This strategic manoeuvring underscores China's intention to project power beyond its borders, employing a blend of hard and soft power tactics. The militarization of these islands signals a departure from previous diplomatic engagement, suggesting a more confrontational approach as it vies for hegemony in a contested regional landscape.

Furthermore, China's partnerships with states such as Iran and Syria, countries often characterized by egregious human rights violations, reflect a strategic alignment that could be interpreted as a challenge to the existing liberal international order. These alliances underscore a willingness to engage with states that share a scepticism of Western hegemony, reinforcing a multipolar world where norms are contested rather than universally accepted. (Rolf, S., & Schindler, S., 2023). Xi Jinping's consolidation of power, mainly through reinterpreting the Chinese Communist Party's constitution, signals an intent to fortify his regime's legitimacy amid mounting domestic and international challenges. By centralizing authority, Xi has sought to maintain stability and projected an image of resoluteness, further complicating China's relations with the global community. The implications of these developments extend far beyond regional geopolitics, suggesting a broader struggle over the definitions of global governance, sovereignty, and human rights. As China continues to assert its influence, the international community must grapple with the ramifications of its ascent and the paradigm shifts it entails in the quest for a new world order.

## **2. Trade and Economic War: USA and China**

The contemporary geopolitical environment is increasingly shaped by the escalating economic rivalry between the United States and China, two dominant global powers whose contestations permeate a spectrum of strategic domains beyond conventional commerce. This multifaceted economic conflict is manifesting through a plethora of mechanisms, including tariffs, sanctions, and a variety of regulatory measures meticulously designed to safeguard national interests while concurrently endeavouring to mitigate the ascendancy of the rival state. As these two nations engage in a protracted economic confrontation, the ramifications extend far beyond their borders, reverberating throughout global supply chains and affecting market stability across multiple regions. This dynamic compels other sovereign states to intricately navigate the complexities of this contentious bilateral relationship, often requiring them to recalibrate their own foreign and economic policies in response to the shifting geopolitical landscape (Goldstein, A., 2021). The interplay of diplomatic engagements, economic policy frameworks, and national security imperatives amplifies the intricacy of negotiations. It underscores the pressing need for robust multilateral mechanisms to effectively address the myriad challenges emerging from this ongoing confrontation. As states grapple with the push and pull of their interdependencies, the pursuit of comprehensive and sustainable solutions becomes paramount in a world increasingly characterized by fragmentation and strategic rivalry.

The intense economic competition between the United States and China has reached new heights since 2018, igniting a significant trade war that has far-reaching implications for both nations and the global economy. This trade conflict can be characterized as a prolonged economic standoff marked by the imposition of tariffs and other trade barriers, fundamentally altering the landscape of international economics (Steinbock, D., 2018). At its core, this trade war is driven by multiple factors, including the significant trade imbalance between the two nations, technological advancements in China, and the overarching narrative of national sovereignty in economic policy. The United States has expressed profound concerns regarding China's rapid technological advancements, particularly in sectors deemed critical for national security, such as artificial intelligence and semiconductor manufacturing. These developments are perceived as challenges to the United States' preeminent global status and economic hegemony (Kapustina, L., Lipková, L., Silin, Y., & Drevalov, A., 2020).

One pivotal aspect contributing to the friction is the role of state intervention in China's economy. The Chinese government's substantial allocation of subsidies to domestic firms, along with the prevalence of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), has raised alarm bells in Washington regarding unfair competitive practices. Such practices are seen as undermining the principle of free and fair trade, a concept that has been a cornerstone of international

relations and economic policy, particularly in the post-World War II era. Moreover, the adoption of protectionist measures by the Trump administration, most notably through the introduction of a 25% tariff on \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports, can be understood through the lens of classical realism in international politics. This perspective posits that states act primarily in pursuit of their national interests, often resulting in a zero-sum game where the gains of one nation are perceived as losses for another. The subsequent retaliatory actions by China further illustrate this dynamic, reflecting the tit-for-tat nature often seen in trade wars (Zeng, K., Wells, R., Gu, J., & Wilkins, A., 2022).

The implications of this economic conflict extend beyond bilateral relations; they resonate across the global stage, disrupting supply chains, altering investment patterns, and straining multilateral trading systems. Countries around the world are compelled to navigate the ramifications of this rivalry, often reassessing their own trade policies and alignments in response to the shifting landscape (Kim, M. H., 2019).

### 3. Technological Rivalry

The discourse surrounding technological advancement has become increasingly pivotal in the geopolitical rivalry between the People's Republic of China and the United States. Historically, Shanghai has served as a magnet for American high-tech enterprises, lured by its abundant labour force and expansive consumer market. Nevertheless, the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with escalating tensions in Sino-American relations, have instigated a reevaluation of investment strategies among these corporations. This paradigm shift has gained traction amid a backdrop of political discord and diminishing prospects for advantageous trade agreements. In light of these complexities, American firms are acutely aware of the imperative to innovate, as the so-called "technological gap" poses a substantive threat to the West's competitive stature—most notably that of the United States. China's "Made in China 2025" strategy represents a concerted effort to enhance the export of high-tech commodities, thereby positioning itself as a formidable player in the global technological landscape. Notably, China has, for some time, outpaced the United States in patent applications, exhibiting a marked improvement in the quality of said patents. Meanwhile, analysts within the American political economy underscore critical internal impediments to innovation. (Allison, G., Klyman, K., Barbesino, K., & Yen, H., 2021). These include an excessive emphasis on short-term profit maximization, a propensity to overlook the cultivation of long-term strategic leadership, and the troubling phenomenon of dependency on proprietary technologies appropriated from China to sustain competitive advantages. This culmination of factors not only exacerbates the technological divide but also poses significant challenges to the United States' standing in the high-tech arena amidst an increasingly assertive Chinese economic strategy.

The geopolitical landscape surrounding the deployment of fifth-generation (5G) telecommunications technology has been markedly influenced by intricate considerations of national security and economic sovereignty. The United States has adopted a stance of strategic pragmatism, urging allied nations to eschew partnerships with Chinese telecommunications behemoth Huawei Technologies, on the grounds of potential cybersecurity threats and information integrity compromises. The spectre of state-sanctioned espionage, facilitated by Huawei's ubiquitous presence, raises the alarm over electronic surveillance capabilities that could undermine the sanctity of data flow within global networks (Kennedy, A. B., & Lim, D. J., 2018). Central to this discourse is the assertion that the Chinese government exerts significant influence over the company's operational decisions through its ownership and regulatory oversight of Huawei, thereby obfuscating the line between corporate autonomy and state interests. The pervasive fear is that 5G infrastructure, if compromised, could be weaponized to enhance the Chinese Communist Party's strategic surveillance apparatus, thereby facilitating malign cyber activities and exacerbating regional geopolitical tensions (Sun, H., 2019).

The United States' position is rooted in a broader national security rationale that seeks to delineate "trusted" technology suppliers from those perceived as posing existential risks. This bifurcation has culminated in an Executive Order enacted in 2019, which categorically identifies Huawei as a national security threat to the integrity of the U.S. communications framework. This policy architecture not only seeks to impose economic restraints on Huawei but also provides financial incentives to alternative suppliers, aiming to foster a competitive ecosystem insulated from Chinese economic retaliation. Critics of the U.S. approach posit that calls for a ban on Huawei could potentially introduce vulnerabilities into the global 5G deployment landscape. The contention that Chinese state support for corporate entities is inherently inequitable when juxtaposed with the U.S. model of private enterprise raises essential questions about the nature of state intervention in technological advancement (Wu, C. X. (2024). Notably, the reliance on Huawei for telecommunications infrastructure by numerous sectors indicates a paradox where perceived security threats coexist with dependency on the very entities deemed as risks. Consequently, it is imperative to analyze the multifaceted implications of these developments. The U.S. narrative prioritizes national security yet simultaneously risks inhibiting technological innovation and collaboration in a

rapidly evolving digital epoch. As nations grapple with the nuances of security and technological advancement, the discourse surrounding Huawei underscores the intricate interplay between corporate governance, state influence, and the geopolitical dynamics that shape contemporary international relations. (Wu, C. X., 2024).

### *3.1 Technological Decoupling*

The evolution of global technology standards is increasingly intertwined with the dynamics of international relations, functioning as instruments of foreign policy and tools for strategic enforcement. This shift is likely to catalyze a fragmentation of supply chains and facilitate the emergence of regionalized networks, wherein states prioritize domestic production and technology sovereignty over global integration. The geopolitical ramifications of this digital revolution are profound, as nations may attempt to curtail the flow of data deemed critical to national security, engendering friction in both political and economic arenas. As countries adopt divergent regulatory frameworks and standards, the global digital marketplace risks bifurcation. This divergence stems from domestic imperatives to safeguard critical network infrastructures and protect sensitive data from potential foreign adversaries. Consequently, we may witness the rise of self-reliant technology hubs—nations that not only adapt to these fractious circumstances but leverage them to position themselves as leaders in technological innovation. (Mirrlees, T. A. N. E. R., 2024). This phenomenon echoes historical instances of technological enclaves, where innovation flourished within isolated frameworks yet leaves more minuscule and less powerful states vulnerable to exclusion from vital economic networks.

The contemporary context of geopolitical tensions, exemplified by trade wars and digital sovereignty debates, further accentuates the nexus between economic hegemony and technological dominance. The war for data—a crucial resource of the information age, will consolidate power among entrenched tech conglomerates, particularly those situated within regional power hubs. These alliances will likely foster enhanced surveillance capabilities and computational infrastructures, reinforcing the existing asymmetries in global power distribution. In the long term, as posited by scholars like Friedberg, we may be transitioning towards a 'partial de-globalization' framework. This model reflects an inward strategic pivot among tremendous and regional powers as they seek to preserve their economic-military interests in the face of ascendant challengers (Zhang, K. H., 2024). The ramifications of this strategy will resonate throughout international trade, diplomatic relations, and global governance structures, challenging the very tenets of globalization that have defined recent decades. The interplay of these elements will necessitate a reevaluation of international cooperation mechanisms, as traditional multilateral frameworks may prove insufficient in addressing the complexities of a fragmented digital ecosystem. As nations navigate this uncharted terrain, the need for adaptable policies that reconcile national security, economic growth, and technological innovation will be paramount in shaping the future landscape of international relations.

The United States has implemented a series of strategic policies aimed at mitigating the implications of China's escalating technological advancements, a dynamic commonly referred to as "technological decoupling" since 2018. While these policies are ostensibly designed to fortify U.S. technological supremacy and safeguard national security interests, their long-term consequences warrant a nuanced analysis, as they may inadvertently catalyze geopolitical tensions and foster unintended repercussions. The primary objective of the U.S. decoupling strategy is to impose restrictive measures on China's access to critical technologies, particularly those governed by export controls. This technocratic cordon is intended to contain the proliferation of advanced military capabilities and to thwart the dissemination of technologies that could facilitate the augmentation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weaponry. However, this policy confronts the precarious balance between competition and cooperation in international relations, as it simultaneously advances U.S. interests while risking escalation in Sino-American rivalry. (Zhang, K. H., 2024).

Moreover, the U.S. narrative posits that China has systematically engaged in intellectual property theft to bolster its technological prowess, thereby posing a challenge to American hegemony. Within this framework, the U.S. government articulates concerns that China's utilization of American educational resources, exemplified by the influx of Chinese students into U.S. academic institutions, inadvertently facilitates China's technological ascension. This assertion suggests a broader apprehension among U.S. policymakers regarding the brain drain phenomenon and the potential ramifications of knowledge transfer. In this geopolitical theatre, it is crucial to consider the agency of China, which is not simply a passive actor in response to U.S. policies. Instead, China's proactive measures to navigate and counteract the effects of U.S. decoupling could lead to a reinvigoration of its domestic innovation capabilities and foster alternative technological alliances. (Scobell, A., 2018). Thus, the intricate interplay between U.S. policy and China's adaptive strategies underscores the complexity of contemporary international politics, wherein strategic miscalculations may culminate in an escalation of hostilities or a recalibration of global power dynamics. Ultimately, while the U.S. seeks to preserve its technological

preeminence, the long-term trajectory of these policies remains uncertain, with the potential for a backlash that could undermine the intended objectives of technological decoupling and reshape the global order.

#### **4. Space Race and Rivalry**

The contemporary escalation of military capabilities in outer space represents a paradigmatic shift analogous to the preceding Cold War arms race. This burgeoning militarization emerged concomitantly with the scientific and commercial exploitation of extraterrestrial realms, delineating a critical juncture in human endeavours. Over the preceding decade, significant multilateral agreements were established to facilitate the peaceful utilization of the Moon and other celestial entities, engendering expectations that the commercial and scientific developments associated with lunar exploration would yield substantive benefits for terrestrial life. (Saunders, P. C., & Bowie, J. G., 2016). However, the recent declaration by the United States, indicating its intention to conduct new manned lunar missions, has precipitated calls from various nations to reaffirm commitments to these pacifist objectives and to eliminate nuclear armaments that had ostensibly been curtailed under previous treaties. This situation exacerbates the disconcerting trend of neglecting the imperative of maintaining outer space as a zone devoid of nuclear armamentation and militarized assets.

The dynamics of this issue were further complicated during the UN's First Committee session on disarmament and international security in October 2020. The United States' obstinate refusal to engage collaboratively with other member states, notably China and Russia, signals a troubling departure from collective security norms. The U.S. delegation's denunciation of the Joint Statement by 25 nations advocating for the demilitarization of space underscores the prevailing geopolitical rifts. The Russian Federation's subsequent entreaty for the United States to reassess its unilateralist stance and join the coalition committed to preserving outer space from militarization highlights the absence of constructive diplomacy. Notably, the Chinese delegation reinforced this perspective, elucidating that the proliferation of such weaponry lacks both defensive utility and strategic rationale, thus further complicating the discourse on space governance and international security norms (Allison, G., & Glick-Unterman, J., 2022).

#### **5. Military Buildup and Tensions**

The complex dynamics of U.S.-China relations, particularly regarding military capabilities and maritime strategy, underscore a profound geopolitical tension that has significant implications for regional and global security. The United States, recognizing the potential for China's military modernization to challenge its dominance, has adopted a multifaceted approach to contain and deter perceived threats emanating from Beijing. China's rapid military advancements—characterized by significant enhancements in air, naval, and missile systems—pose a dual challenge: they potentially enhance China's operational reach and effectiveness while simultaneously eroding the United States' historical advantage in military superiority. This concern is compounded by China's strategic orientation towards Taiwan and its growing array of asymmetrical capabilities, including anti-satellite technologies and cyber warfare tools, which are perceived as efforts to level the playing field against U.S. military assets. (Goldstein, L. J., & Kozyrev, V., 2020).

The U.S. Navy's paramount importance in ensuring freedom of navigation and maintaining control over critical maritime chokepoints is central to American strategy. As outlined in several defense assessments, including the Pentagon's reports to Congress, there is a consensus that, if current trajectories continue, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) could transition to a state of military parity with the U.S. by mid-century. Such projections compel the U.S. to adapt its naval strategies, emphasizing deterrence and access denial in the South China Sea, Malacca Strait, and other vital regions. Moreover, the narrative of encirclement resonates strongly within Chinese strategic circles. Beijing perceives the U.S.'s defense cooperation arrangements with regional allies as encroachments on its sovereignty and an attempt to contain its ascent (Ross, R. S. (2020)). This reciprocal mistrust is exacerbated by joint military exercises and arms sales to Taiwan, further solidifying China's perception of a strategic posture aimed at undermining its national security. Thus, as both powers navigate this fraught landscape, their respective military doctrines appear increasingly focused on ensuring maritime dominance. The U.S. seeks to reassure allies while maintaining critical access routes, whereas China endeavors to expand its influence and deter U.S. interventions. In this intricate interplay of power politics, the stakes are not just confined to bilateral relations but extend to larger themes of international order, regional stability, and the legitimacy of state sovereignty in an era marked by rising multipolarity.

The geopolitical dynamics in the South China Sea exemplify a critical aspect of the ongoing rivalry between China and the United States. The region is not merely significant for its limited natural resources, such as oil and gas reserves, but is primarily a strategic military area that holds substantial implications for national security and regional stability. Historically, the South China Sea has served as a critical maritime corridor, facilitating a

substantial portion of global trade. For the United States, maintaining freedom of navigation in this area is paramount, particularly in the context of its naval superiority over China. The U.S. Navy, primarily through the Seventh Fleet based in the Pacific, retains the capability to interdict Chinese maritime commerce in the event of conflict. This potential for engagement underscores the strategic importance of the South China Sea in U.S. military doctrine, which emphasizes power projection and the ability to operate in contested environments (Erickson, A. S., 2019). In response to perceived U.S. encroachments and strategic challenges, China has adopted an assertive defense strategy characterized by the creation of an 'anti-access/area denial' (A2/AD) zone. Central to this strategy is the fortification of the first island chain, which encompasses a series of islands that stretch from Japan to the Philippines. Through extensive land reclamation and the deployment of sophisticated shore-based anti-ship missile systems, China aims to establish a formidable defensive perimeter. A recent Pentagon report highlights these developments, emphasizing the increased militarization of this region and the implications for U.S. naval operations.

Moreover, China's military modernization is significantly fueled by its rising defense budget, which has consistently outpaced that of the United States in percentage growth terms. As of the latest data, China's military expenditures are estimated at approximately \$180 billion, making it the third-largest military spender globally. The country is not only investing heavily in expanding its naval capabilities, including submarines, destroyers, and aircraft carriers but is also becoming the foremost global purchaser of arms, mainly from Russia. Such investments position the Chinese navy as the most formidable maritime force in Asia, potentially altering the balance of power in the region. Furthermore, China's growing military capabilities and assertive strategies carry implications beyond the immediate region (Korolev, A., 2019). They challenge the established norms of international maritime law and raise questions regarding the future of U.S.-China relations, as well as the security of smaller nations in the Asia-Pacific. As states navigate this increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, the interplay of military capability, economic power, and diplomatic engagement will be crucial in shaping the future dynamics in the South China Sea and beyond.

### *5.1 Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*

The United States adopted a strategic approach aimed at fostering mutually advantageous trade relations with China, driven by the desire to enhance the economic welfare of its populace, mitigate tensions between Moscow and Beijing, and integrate China into a collaborative framework with Western nations. This strategy was articulated through a dual policy framework: first, the aim to curb the expansion of Communism globally, which included significant involvement in the Indo-China conflict; and second, the continuation of an economic embargo initiated in 1949 to obstruct China's access to advanced technologies and military capabilities. This balancing act between engagement and containment became notably complicated following a confrontation between the U.S. and China in 1950, which severely challenged the potential for diplomatic accommodation. The 1954 summit of SEATO allies reinforced this tension by detailing collective defense initiatives aimed at countering perceived threats in the region. A notable crisis in Indo-China emerged in 1958, which further tested regional stability. Between 1959 and 1960, the dynamics shifted with an escalation in arms supplies and the deployment of shorter-range missiles to Nationalist China, coinciding with provocative naval and air operations between Nationalist forces and Chinese Communist units, particularly around the Quemoy-Matsu islands and in the Tonkin Gulf (Gorenburg, D., 2019). This complex interplay highlights the intricate geopolitical landscape of the era, underscoring the challenges faced by the U.S. in navigating its dual objectives of containment and engagement.

The contemporary field of global affairs regarding arms control and non-proliferation emphasizes a critical examination of the United States' nuclear posture in relation to both Russia and China. The existing framework of multilateral and bilateral agreements, such as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the New START, reflects a complex interplay of power dynamics that shape global security paradigms. However, the efficacy of these treaties has been increasingly called into question, particularly in light of geopolitical shifts following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent transformations in Russian military doctrine. The post-Cold War era has revealed inherent vulnerabilities within the arms control regime, primarily due to the stagnation or outright termination of key agreements. The abandonment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaties signifies a broader retreat from cooperative security frameworks, engendering a resurgence of unrestrained arms development strategies. As noted by scholars like T.V. Paul and John J. Mearsheimer, the absence of constraints invites not only vertical but also horizontal proliferation, raising alarm over the potential for an arms race in volatile regions (Zhao, T., 2020).

In contrast to the historical US-Soviet nuclear dynamics characterized by a clear qualitative superiority, the US-China relationship presents a different strategic calculus. The United States maintains a qualitative edge in nuclear capabilities, yet this relationship lacks the extensive Soviet arsenals that defined Cold War deterrence. While the

Nuclear Posture Review underscores the need for superior strategic capabilities relative to China, it is essential to recognize that the People's Republic of China has effectively developed a credible nuclear deterrent, leveraging its geographical advantages and strategic posture to ensure an assured destruction capability against US forces. The US attempts to project power through its global military logistics and advanced technological capabilities do not negate the inherent asymmetries present in the US-China relationship. Chinese strategic doctrines emphasize asymmetric warfare, which challenges conventional notions of deterrence based solely on the quantity of nuclear forces (Yuan, J. D., 2003). This deviation from the nuclear paradigms of the 20th century suggests that traditional frameworks, such as mutual assured destruction (MAD), may not adequately address the contemporary threats posed by rising powers.

Moreover, the strategic stability in the Asia-Pacific region is compounded by the interplay of regional security dynamics, including North Korea's nuclear ambitions and India's expanding arsenal. The resulting multipolarity complicates arms control efforts and necessitates a reevaluation of US strategic objectives and alliances in Asia. The strategic calculations must account for the potential proliferation of capabilities within this multipolar framework, as emerging threats and regional conflicts could incite new arms races (Medeiros, E. S., 2001).

## **6. Religious Freedom and State Atheism**

Religious liberty is enshrined in the American Declaration of Human Rights as an unconditional right, serving as the cornerstone of a just society that fosters peace and upholds human dignity. This emphasis on religious freedom underscores the belief that individuals should have the right to practice their faith without interference, ensuring that diverse beliefs can coexist harmoniously within the social fabric. In contrast, China presents a different narrative regarding religious freedom. Although the Chinese government officially proclaims the value of freedom of belief, this freedom is heavily influenced and controlled by the state. The government's efforts to regulate religious practices often manifest in restrictions that limit the ways in which individuals can express their faith. For instance, the state imposes penalties on what it deems as religious propaganda, effectively denying individuals the rights of citizenship under certain religious expressions (Gallagher, N., 2019).

The fundamental principles of democracy, such as pluralism, political tolerance, fairness in governance, healthy competition, and adherence to the rule of law—are closely tied to the ability of individuals to profess their religious beliefs freely. A genuinely democratic society thrives on the ability of diverse religious, spiritual, and philosophical perspectives to engage in dialogue, which fosters reconciliation and cultivates mutual respect among its citizens. An illustrative example of a functioning democracy can be seen in the coexistence of individuals from varied religious backgrounds. When people of different faiths, doctrines, and belief systems come together, they can develop a mutual understanding and engage in cooperative efforts that enhance community cohesion. Such religious tolerance is not merely a passive acceptance; it is a proactive guarantee of other civil liberties, contributing to the protection of fundamental societal structures and promoting a rich diversity of opinions and practices within the community (Gallagher, N., 2019). Ultimately, the flourishing of religious freedom lays the groundwork for a vibrant and resilient society where diverse voices can coexist and thrive.

China is not a theocratic state or a civil society, but it is used as an ideological vacuum to control the political life of civilians. The People's Republic of China is the most significant modernist state with strong religious beliefs. Unlike other modern countries, especially Russia and Europe, which have separated state and church, China uses ideology as a concatenation instrument for maintaining communist dictatorship. Religious freedom principles, such as the clear separation of state and church, the removal of administrative power from their claims, and the destruction of religious practices by the state and its means that control objective behaviour, such as banning services or collective religious practices, are not where people can be established. (Glaser, B. S., 2016, March). In China, there were instances of societal discrimination, including in education, employment, marriage, and housing, against adherents of different religions and members of ethnic minority groups. Religious worship and practice continued to be regulated and monitored by the government through the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" for Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and Taoism. These associations are the only legal way through which religious groups may conduct business, such as building places of worship, gathering for religious services, or officially publishing religious materials. Many religious adherents resisted joining these associations, however, believing that doing so would allow government and political influence on religious bodies (Olsen, E. A., & Winterford, D., 1994).

These associations' practices frequently opposed existing religious leadership and beliefs, creating a complex landscape in which the government struggled to regulate religious practice effectively. This challenge was compounded by a government interpretation of what constituted "religion," as defined by North American scholars. For instance, although these associations often received financial support and guidance from international

sources, any religious activities that fell outside the framework of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" were deemed illegal. Nonetheless, in practice, only a minor percentage of individuals engaged in these unsanctioned religious activities faced detention or sentencing (Erickson, A. S., 2019). This suggests that the government did not uniformly enforce a broad repressive strategy against all peaceful religious expressions. Individuals and spiritual leaders attempting to create or sustain religious outlets independent of the state-regulated system encountered varying degrees of official harassment. This harassment could manifest in multiple ways, including the forced closure or demolition of places of worship, the revocation of legal registration for religious groups, and an array of punitive measures that ranged from fines to temporary detainment.

## 7. Regional Alliances and Partnerships

In light of the increasingly tense and complex geopolitical landscape between the United States and China, Washington has made a concerted effort to strengthen its alliances with other nations, viewing these relationships as crucial for counterbalancing Beijing's expanding global influence. This strategic emphasis on close partnerships is driven by the recognition that China's economic clout poses both opportunities and challenges. While the U.S. seeks to align more closely with its allies to address shared concerns over China's activities, economic interdependencies also introduce a level of resistance to these efforts. This duality creates a complicated dynamic, where the push for more substantial political and military alliances must navigate the realities of deepening economic ties with China (Goldstein, L. J., & Kozyrev, V., 2020).

The rapid shift toward prioritizing Asia, particularly under the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" in 2018, illustrates a significant escalation in the rivalry and competitive ambitions between these two superpowers. This policy shift reflects an acknowledgement that global power dynamics are increasingly being defined in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States' strategy involves not only showcasing its military presence but also actively encouraging its allies in Asia to bolster their own defense capabilities and engage in joint security initiatives (Saunders, P. C., & Bowie, J. G., 2018). Moreover, the development of bilateral mechanisms focused on ensuring security and fostering strategic partnerships plays a critical role in this geopolitical contest. As the United States and China vie for influence, their competitive positions in Asia will be pivotal in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. The outcomes of this rivalry, influenced by both the strategic alignments of allies and the evolving economic relationships, will ultimately determine not just the nature of the U.S.-China relationship but also the global order moving forward.

The historical bipartisan consensus regarding American-Chinese relations may exemplify a distinctive case of policy continuity within the often-volatile landscape of Washington's foreign policy. This solidarity garnered commendation from the President, particularly in the context of the official "One China" policy—an acknowledgement of a singular geopolitical entity while allowing for potential variations in its constitutional manifestation. Notwithstanding the evolving geopolitical dynamics, the foundational elements of the U.S.-China balance of power paradigm remained largely intact. In response to the shifting international environment, Washington has actively sought to reaffirm its deterrent capacity and bolster the security frameworks of its regional allies in Asia. This strategic orientation reflects a complex interplay between domestic predispositions towards isolationism—coupled with critiques of President Bush's "multilateral adventurism"—that prompted President Obama to articulate a foreign policy predicated upon the principle of "first, do no harm." (Saunders, P. C., & Bowie, J. G., 2018).

The inaugural foreign trip undertaken by President Obama signified the commencement of an expansive, synergistic U.S.-China agenda, reinforcing commitments to mutual interests while navigating the intricate web of international relations. In Singapore, the President not only reaffirmed the longstanding policy posture of the United States but did so with a greater degree of transparency and accessibility in his rhetoric compared to his predecessor. Ultimately, the core tenets of American foreign policy in Asia remain consistent: the prioritization of security interests, the reinforcement of alliances, and the mitigation of potential strategic adversaries. These foundational pillars continue to shape the United States' engagement with China and its approach to regional geopolitics.

The United States does not maintain official relations with Taiwan; however, it remains Taiwan's most significant unofficial international ally. The Taiwan Relations Act underscores the importance of resolving differences between Taiwan and the mainland peacefully, reflecting US policy that avoids making any defensive commitments to Taiwan. A reduction in US-China tensions could foster political and economic developments in Taiwan that might challenge communist rule in China, potentially jeopardizing long-term US interests by diminishing China's ability to uphold a stable international order. While the US does not recognize Taiwan as a separate nation and lacks official diplomatic ties with the government in Taipei, Taiwan holds considerable importance for several



reasons. Its 22 million residents provide significant demographic and military strength. Additionally, the Taipei government serves as a vital trading partner and contributes substantial foreign reserves, largely invested in the US, which supports American living standards. Furthermore, the US acts as Taiwan's gateway to the global community. Strategically, the US requires regional allies like Taiwan to mitigate the potential threats posed by Chinese military ambitions to US Pacific forces and to deny strategic advantages to adversaries of the United States.

## 8. Impact on Global Affairs

The future of global governance will be shaped by the actions of major nations, with geopolitical and economic connections serving as critical determinants. Over the past 70 to 80 years, the landscape of international relations, the framework of the global economy, and the nature of international interactions have been primarily guided by multilateral cooperation and the influence of global governance organizations. These regional and global economic institutions have played pivotal roles in this ongoing evolution. The intricate and layered relationships between countries are navigated within these organizations, guided by established rules that outline rights and responsibilities. In this arena, economic frameworks significantly influence the decision-making processes of international bodies (Hollihan, T. A., & Zhang, Z., 2012). Yet, it's essential to note that the realm of security operates differently, often favouring military approaches. The dynamics involved in aligning the security interests of experts, academics, and policymakers diverge from those of economic considerations, creating a complex tapestry of international relations.

Global governance does not equate to a centralized world government or a singular international authority. Instead, it encompasses the concerted efforts of a diverse array of states and non-state actors aimed at fostering order, stability, and predictability in international relations and cooperation. Rather than existing as a unified framework, global governance is characterized by various clusters of international regimes, each shaped and influenced by the policies and actions of individual governments. The concept of cohesive "world governance" has faced significant interruptions in recent years due to the emergence of complex global challenges, including environmental issues, economic disparities, and social inequalities. Additionally, different states—from developed to developing nations—exhibit varying demands and expectations regarding governance structures, complicating efforts to establish a universally accepted system. Consequently, the evolving distribution of power and resources is not adequately reflected in the current division of global influence.

The concentration of power among regional and global actors, many of whom have intricate historical and relational ties to each other, has led to the emergence of various global governance frameworks. These frameworks play a vital role in facilitating international policy coordination, particularly in the spheres of economic governance and social policy. For instance, the United States has historically been a predominant force in shaping many of these international regimes, exerting considerable influence in global decision-making processes. The global economic crisis spanning the years between 1932 and 1945 had a profound effect on the development of international governance frameworks. The Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 marked a critical juncture, bringing together key players such as the Republic of China, the British Empire, and the USSR alongside various allied and neutral nations (Rafique, N., 2002). This event laid the groundwork for establishing a regulated economic order characterized by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Following this, the Marshall Plan not only aimed to rebuild war-torn Europe but also initiated the architectural and financial foundations that eventually contributed to the formation of the European Union. Additionally, the establishment of the United Nations was instrumental in promoting international cooperation on a wide array of global issues, providing a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Throughout this period, the Asian market also began to develop, albeit in phases marked by capital liberalization, increasing external dependence, and the United States' technological preeminence. However, this growth was often overshadowed by political crises and conflicts, which necessitated the formulation and implementation of resolutions over time. The liberalization efforts were further bolstered by enhanced technological capabilities, enabling institutions to respond more effectively to emerging challenges. As global governance continues to evolve, the link between policy and the ability of these international institutions to maintain legitimacy and fairness will be crucial. After the end of the Cold War in 1990, many of these dynamics intensified. A growing number of countries began to question the established structures of global governance, advocating for the creation of new political and legal institutions. This trend reflects a broader desire for representation and equity in international organizations, highlighting the need for a responsive governance framework that can adapt to the changing global landscape.

Historically, a significant portion of technological leadership rested within the United States, a position that was bolstered by consistent GDP growth and the allocation of capital toward fostering innovative technological

advancements. This economic model facilitated the establishment of numerous domestic companies that exhibited resilience against the pressures of the global market. These firms operated with a level of independence from international flows of labour, funding, and data, effectively creating a robust national framework. The United States dominated the cloud computing sector, establishing it as a pivotal domain where it continually delivered cutting-edge technological gadgets and services to its clients and partners. This dynamic not only supported the technological needs of businesses but also empowered them to generate and supply essential resources, thereby enhancing the manufacturing capabilities available to global markets. The processes of data replication and processing became increasingly decentralized as they were distributed among various nations.

In contrast, China's commercial strategy has raised significant concerns in Western nations, primarily due to its aggressive and technology-dependent approach that many perceive as both unjust and a considerable risk to national security. The Chinese government's insistence on national companies relinquishing partial control over their local branches sent a clear international signal, prompting the United States and its allies to reconsider their trade strategies. This shift catalyzed the development of trade policies designed to isolate the People's Republic of China and prioritize economic connections with more allied nations. The unfolding scenario sparked a new era of economic tension reminiscent of an accounting war between the United States and the European Union. This period saw heightened scrutiny directed toward major technological firms, coupled with resistance from these companies against government-led initiatives, including proposed anti-crisis financing measures. The outcome was a growing ambition to replace the informal American economic empire with a more cohesive network of like-minded economies cooperating under a unified framework of regulations.

As globalization continues to evolve, many governments have begun to recognize the imperative of diversifying their supply chains to ensure the highest standards of quality and security. This realization gained particular prominence following the devastating Tsunami in Japan in 2011, which severely disrupted supply chain operations, particularly between Japan and surrounding regions. The economic fallout underscored the critical vulnerability of countries that relied heavily on a limited pool of suppliers. The primary challenge identified was the insufficient diversification of suppliers, which hampered the flexibility and speed required to restore production after significant disruptions. For instance, the automobile industry faced significant downstream constraints, magnifying the consequences of suddenly unavailable raw materials and components, which in turn contributed to substantial economic difficulties for suppliers struggling to adapt to abrupt shifts in demand (Goldstein, L. J., 2015).

To mitigate future risks, industries are compelled to adopt a strategy of diversification, avoiding excessive reliance on singular suppliers that are perceived as high-quality yet potentially untrustworthy. The goal is to obtain a diversified supplier base that mirrors a multi-country distribution model for manufacturing facilities. It is crucial to highlight that true diversification necessitates collaborative efforts among governments regarding critical political and economic factors, including import/export licenses, taxation policies, and regulatory frameworks. Concurrently, companies must take proactive measures to secure diversification by carefully choosing suppliers that possess multiple production capacities worldwide, thus bolstering their resilience against potential global disruptions. This multifaceted approach will be essential for navigating the complexities of today's interconnected economy while safeguarding national interests.

## 9. Future Scenarios

This work represents a significant advancement in both conceptual and practical frameworks addressing issues typically confined to futurology. We anticipate it will be met with the expected level of scrutiny and application. At its core, this study grapples with the pressing question of the future of America-China relations: Is conflict unavoidable? Additionally, in the rapidly evolving economic and technological landscape—which has been largely overlooked in existing literature—we seek to analyze which nation is strategically positioned to excel and in which sectors of advanced technology the rivalry will be most intense. By critically assessing the notion of the "Thucydides Trap" through philosophical and historical lenses and countering the alarmist trends in futurology with a reasoned exploration of political action, we present a comprehensive and nuanced imaginative exercise. This endeavour is intended not only to provoke thoughtful discourse but also to reflect on a pivotal moment in history. We find ourselves in an era marked by powerful yet sometimes authoritarian states that, despite their differences, remain part of a shared international community capable of mutual support under certain conditions.

The current US administration has adopted a confrontational stance toward several adversaries and what it terms "strategic rivals," naming China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as primary concerns. Notably, China has been characterized as the foremost "existential threat" to the United States, with the rhetoric surrounding this characterization intensifying to a historically unprecedented degree. This framing has led to the declaration of a

"new Cold War," drawing parallels with the geopolitical tensions of the 20th century. However, this analogy can obscure the complexities of the contemporary global landscape, as it conflates two distinct sets of historical realities and motivations. The original Cold War was defined by a clear ideological divide and a specific context that is markedly different from today's multifaceted geopolitical dynamics. By imposing the narrative of the first Cold War onto current tensions, there is a risk of overestimating the capabilities and intentions of both the United States and its rivals, which could lead to heightened misunderstandings and escalation. The implications of this approach are significant, as it creates a narrative of an impending conflict that has apocalyptic dimensions and diminishes prospects for peaceful coexistence. Despite the prevailing atmosphere of tension, it is essential to recognize that a more nuanced perspective may provide pathways toward de-escalation and dialogue. Embracing alternative viewpoints could open opportunities for collaboration and understanding, fostering a more peaceful global community. While a comprehensive de-escalation process may appear distant at this moment, the potential for a different approach could lead to a more stable and harmonious world for future generations.

The issue at hand presents significant political implications alongside complex methodological challenges regarding the usefulness of applied semantics. In diplomacy, clarity and precision are essential not only to understand the current situation but also to define the objectives. Negotiation must be distinctly separate from religious arbitration. Furthermore, the semantics we use are foundational to developing a coherent perspective; can we genuinely label the intricate dynamics of an observed system to reveal a credible contradiction? Distinguishing authentic behaviours from those that arise from a need to project certain images is crucial for effective policy design. Ultimately, the future of technological innovation and international cooperation hinges on mutual trust and respect. In a landscape dominated by aggressive diplomacy, which relies more on stalling action than on strategic negotiations, the risk of misunderstandings increases. Responding incorrectly to the wrong questions can lead to disastrous consequences, making this approach a risky and costly endeavour.

## 10. Conclusion

Many analysts are drawing attention to the profound implications of the recent leadership changes in the United States, particularly in the context of the 2025 presidential election. This transition in governance has spurred speculation about a potential redirection in foreign policy. However, it is essential to recognize that a formal announcement of a shift in direction was not strictly necessary. The trajectory of U.S. foreign policy can be seen as a direct result of both the actions and decisions made by current American and Chinese leaders, as well as the long-standing aspirations nurtured by their respective populations and institutional frameworks. This evolving dynamic has rendered the reactions of leaders from other nations somewhat predictable, as they grapple with how to adapt to this new geopolitical landscape—all while the challenge of navigating these changes looms large.

The reality is that globalization and interdependence have significantly reshaped the structural dynamics of our contemporary world, moving away from the clear-cut bipolarity that characterized the early Cold War era. In the contemporary context, it can be posited that despite the intricate geopolitical puzzles we face, the cataclysmic confrontations that echo the devastation of the two World Wars seem implausible to the majority of today's leaders. This perspective is heavily influenced by the economic lessons learned over the past few decades, which emphasize the interconnectedness of global economies and the perils of conflict. This line of reasoning provides substantial ground for the scepticism surrounding the term 'New Cold War,' which is often questioned by scholars and policymakers alike. It is crucial to remember that the original Cold War serves more as a conceptual framework than a direct analogy to today's international relations. In practical terms, it encapsulated an escalating series of disputes characterized by their potential for conflict, yet it never devolved into a direct military confrontation between the primary actors involved. When contemplating the possibility of a contemporary geopolitical standoff akin to a new Cold War, it is important to anticipate an engagement of a different magnitude. The tensions currently observed between China and Russia might serve as a prelude, but the stakes are higher today. The potential for conflict could extend beyond mere bilateral disputes to encompass broader concerns regarding the legitimacy of the international order, its foundational principles, and the overall stability of the global system. As we navigate these complexities, the international community must be vigilant and proactive in addressing the emerging challenges posed by these shifting dynamics.

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