



**The Emerging Global Order:
A Comparative Analysis of China and US Strategies in the Indo-Pacific Region**

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Abstract:

This research aims to compare and analyze the strategies of China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region with respect to emerging global order. The research employs qualitative research method and thematic analysis to comparatively analyze the strategies of these great powers. The research examines these policies through two contrasting theoretical frameworks. First, Offensive Realism to analyze the US strategy. Second, the English School of Thought to understand China's approach in the Indo-Pacific Region. The study argues that the world order is shifting from Pax-Americana to Pax-Sinica. The new world order will be multipolar in nature, where the US will remain the dominant power but not unilaterally, other powers, will join hands in shaping the geopolitical and geo-economic affairs. China is expected to assume the leading role in geo-economic affairs. Rather than dismantling the liberal institutional order, China will refine the existing framework by introducing Chinese characteristics of "shared destiny" or win-win cooperation and avoid confrontation or intervention in domestic affairs. Pax-Sinica order will be focused on geo-economics and will not pay attention to the internal political dynamics of any sovereign country. Hence, the liberal institutional order will be sustained, however, with a new set of rules and norm.

Keywords: The US, China, Pax-Americana, Pax-Sinica, Indo-Pacific region, hegemony, strategic competition, global order

INTRODUCTION

The rise and fall of great powers have historically had a significant impact on changing world order. The World order constitutes one of the central concepts in the study of international relations and serves as an analytical framework for interpreting global developments and the foreign policy behavior of states. International orders are shaped by dominant actors, and the institutional and normative structures they establish largely reflect their strategic preferences and interests. The sustainability of any such order depends on the economic strength and military capabilities of its leading powers, which enable them to maintain stability and enforce compliance within the system.

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An international political system delineates the rights, obligations and behavioral constraints accepted by its founding states, thereby regulating their interactions with one another. Once established, an international order tends to persist as long as hegemonic powers possess the capacity and willingness to uphold it. However, when these powers experience relative decline, or when emerging actors challenge the prevailing distribution of power, the existing order gradually erodes. This erosion produces a transitional phase characterized by uncertainty and instability before a new order takes shape. Furthermore, changes in the identity, interests and strategic outlook of hegemonic actors contribute to the systematic transformation of international systems. Consequently, every international order is historically contingent, reflecting the specific power configurations and normative assumptions of its particular era (Falk, 2009).

Henry Kissinger defines world order as “the concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world” (Kissinger, 2015). According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), world order is a “set body of rules, norms and institutions that govern relations between the key players on the global stage” (World Economic Forum, 2017).

World order can be defined analytically and prescriptively. Analytically, world order refers to the structure of power and authority that forms the foundation for diplomacy and global political interactions on an international scale. Prescriptively, international order denotes an idealized arrangement of power and authority aimed at promoting values such as peace, economic development, human rights and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, International politics operates in an anarchic structure, which means that no central authority possesses effective control over the global system. Hence, within an anarchic system, international order does not arise organically rather it is consciously constructed and maintained by the most powerful actors (Falk, 2009).

The struggle for hegemony and the establishment of world order can be traced back to older civilizations, started in third millennium BC. However, the defining framework for the world order of modern state system has often been associated with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The modern world order is rooted in the historical development of Europe, which is primarily based on the emergence of the sovereign state as the predominant political entity. Furthermore, this modern world order envisions international society on the basis of the relationships among the major European states and viewing the relationship with non-European states as hierarchal. In this framework, the superior European states governing subordinated non-European/western states. The characteristic form for this hierarchical arrangement was primarily based on colonial powers. In the early Westphalian era, the states that belonged to international society as full members were autocratic in nature, primarily monarchies. It is significant to understand that this modern state system demonstrated a strong tension among a series of juridical ideas based on the equality and sovereignty of states and the realities of power dynamics that reflected inequality.

The evolution of world order remains an ongoing and dynamic process. Each international political system is rooted in the specific historical, political and material conditions prevailing at the time of its formation. As these underlying conditions change, the rules, norms and institutional arrangements sustaining a given order become increasingly difficult to maintain, thereby necessitating the emergence of new frameworks better suited to evolving realities (Grinin, 2016).

Since the disintegration of the USSR, the global paradigm shifted towards the US-led unipolar order, with the United States occupying an unmatched and uncontested superpower status. Nevertheless, with the emergence of new powers like China and Russia, the US-EU transatlantic axis, essentially the cornerstone of this unique arrangement, started to lose its ability to sustain the governance of the US-led unipolar world order. Every passing day, the voices proclaiming that the world order is shifting towards a new multipolar world order.

Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a major power, gradually expanding its influence in the Indo-Pacific Region. This growing influence of China posing significant challenges to the US Hegemony. Consequently, the United States from the Obama Administration shifted their foreign Policy from Middle East to Indo-Pacific Region amid China's growing influence and the gradual decline of US hegemony. Hence, the region serves as a central arena for strategic competition among the great powers. The Dynamics of world order are in transition phase and heading towards a multipolar world order.

In this context, it is evident that the United States' position as the sole superpower is increasingly being challenged. Historically, transitions in world order have rarely occurred without confrontation between established and rising powers, rendering periods of systemic change inherently contentious. Nevertheless, the character of such confrontation in the twenty-first century is likely to differ from earlier historical precedents. Within this shifting global landscape, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a central arena of great-power competition, as both the United States and China seek to expand their influence in pursuit of broader global strategic objectives. Hence, the study aims to comparatively analyze the strategies of United States and China regarding the pursuit of 21st century international agenda and to assess its implications of these strategies for the emerging world order.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamics of the new world order and the strategies of major powers in the Indo-Pacific region have been broadly discussed by consulting books, articles in important periodicals, journals and other literature on the subject. Although a substantial amount of scholarly material on the topic does exist, but a detailed examination of related material and critical analysis would facilitate to find gap and research on new areas.

Realist scholars largely view confrontation as inevitable. John J. Mearsheimer (2001) argues that great powers inevitably seek hegemony and predicts that China's ascent will provoke balancing behavior from the US. Graham Allison (2017) revives the concept of "Thucydides Trap," where fear of a rising power leads to war. Henry Kissinger (2011) discusses the necessity of strategic restraint and emphasizes for balance-of-power diplomacy to prevent miscalculation.

In contrast, liberal institutionalists argue that rivalry can be moderated through cooperation and institutions. G. John Ikenberry (2011) illustrates that the liberal international order remains resilient and capable of integrating China rather than excluding it. Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2004) emphasizes "soft power" and the US capacity to attract through values and culture as key to managing competition peacefully. Michael Swaine (2020) calls for a "managed strategic competition," by balancing national interests with dialogue. David Shambaugh (2013) portrays

China as a “partial power” constrained by internal limits, suggesting that Beijing’s challenge to the US may be more symbolic than structural.

Constructivist and regional perspectives highlight the role of ideas and identities in shaping behavior. Evelyn Goh (2008) introduces the concept of “Omni-enmeshment,” where smaller Asian states engage both powers to prevent dominance by either, illustrating how local actors influence the balance of power. Kishore Mahbubani (2020) challenges Western exceptionalism, arguing that the rise of China signifies a legitimate shift toward multipolarity rather than a threat to order. Meanwhile, Yan Xuetong’s theory of “moral realism” posits that China seeks influence through virtue and responsibility. However, critics argue this may serve as a rhetorical cover for power politics.

Odd Arne Westad (2017) situates U.S.–China tensions within a broader history of systemic power transitions. He argues that economic interdependence makes a new Cold War unlikely. Elizabeth Economy (2018) links Xi Jinping’s centralization of power to China’s more assertive global stance, arguing that domestic authoritarian consolidation drives external ambition.

Proponents of the Biden administration’s approach such as Freeman, Markey and Singh (2022) argue that the IPS successfully builds partnerships based on shared democratic values and multilateral cooperation. Through frameworks like the Quad and engagement with ASEAN, the U.S. seeks to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, counter authoritarian influence and encourage economic growth. Similarly, the Belfer Center report emphasizes that while the Quad’s achievements remain modest, the emergence of AUKUS and the Partners in the Blue Pacific demonstrate Washington’s commitment to maintaining technological and security superiority in the region (Arimoto et al., 2023).

Government publications reinforce this narrative. The US Department of State (2023) and Department of Defense (Garamone, 2023) report tangible progress, stronger alliances, improved maritime security and a network of partners committed in order to uphold international norms. However, Jones (2022) argues the IPS risks incoherence since it preceded broader strategic documents like the National Security Strategy, potentially leaving its priorities misaligned with other U.S. global policies.

Several scholars identify structural weaknesses in the Washington’s approach. Charlton and Gao (2023) contend that Washington’s strategy is overly security-centric with insufficient economic engagement to compete with China’s trade and investment reach. The Brookings Institution (Bush et al., 2022) recommends deeper economic ties through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and even US accession to the CPTPP. Without a strong economic pillar, the IPS risks being perceived merely as a containment mechanism rather than a developmental partnership.

The Indian Ocean has emerged as a critical sub-theater of this broader contest. Saha (2023) argues that Washington’s neglect of the Indian Ocean undermines the coherence of its Indo-Pacific vision, urging more robust Coast Guard and diplomatic presence along African and South Asian coastlines. Gurjar (2022) adds that the US cannot disengage from the region without jeopardizing global order, as regional actors now play a significant role in shaping global governance dynamics.

However, regional perceptions vary sharply. Khan (2021) highlights the IPS's destabilizing implications for South Asia, particularly the perception in Pakistan that U.S. support for India could exacerbate regional tensions. Azam (2023) goes further, labeling the IPS "doomed," arguing that it alienates allies and fails to address local development priorities.

From the US perspective, Singh (2023) sees countering China as the IPS's organizing principle. The US must defend Taiwan, expand its economic footprint and reduce supply-chain dependence on China. However, Beijing's "Blue Dragon" strategy (Mendis & Luszczkiewicz, 2023) mirrors these moves through military and economic expansion between Sri Lanka and Taiwan. Koyuncu (2022) similarly argues that under Xi Jinping, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and naval modernization have replaced Deng-era restraint with overt expansionism which is a "New Great Game" for regional dominance.

Western scholars such as Tauffer and Wallsh (2023) argues that China's aggressive posture ironically strengthens US coalitions, as its coercive diplomacy drives smaller states toward Washington. On the other hand, Chinese scholars like Jaknanihan (2022) interpret the IPS as an exclusionary construct aimed at containment, prompting Beijing to advance alternative regional visions like the "community of common destiny."

China's rise has undeniably reshaped regional security. Dev (2022) notes that its militarization of the South China Sea, infrastructure projects like the Hambantota port and "debt-trap diplomacy" challenge stability and sovereignty across South Asia. Mohit (2023) warns that China's dominance over the Malacca Strait reflects long-term ambitions to control key maritime chokepoints, while Kalim et al. (2023) and Manhas (2022) show how these dynamics have revived power-balancing coalitions such as the Quad.

The militarization of the Indo-Pacific has triggered what Grare and Samaan (2022) describe as an "arms race," with India, China and extra-regional actors like the U.S. and France expanding their naval footprints. Pant (2023) documents India's assertive response to Chinese expansion.

Despite this body of literature, several research gaps remain. The effectiveness of the US strategy is debated, with scholars divided over its success. Hence, a comprehensive analysis is required to understand the effectiveness of the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy. Second, a detailed analysis of bilateral security pacts is missing. Third, the western literature appears to be more biased, viewing China as the threat to regional peace and stability while overlooking the fact that the US, Canada, Australia and the EU have launched their Indo-Pacific Strategies that are primarily security-centric, contributing to security dilemma in the region. Moreover, some western scholars describe US – China competitions as a new Cold War. However, the US and Soviet were competing for the superiority of their respective ideology and market system whereas the US and China are competing for the dominance within the existing framework. Lastly, Chinese perspective regarding their power projection in the region is lacking in the existing literature. China claims that their rise is peaceful, however, the United States and its allies has perceived China as threat to regional peace and stability in general and International order in particular. Therefore, a comprehensive study that considers both western and Chinese perspectives is needed to comparatively analyze their policies and draw informed conclusion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive–analytical research approach to examine the key dimensions of Sino–US strategic competition and assess its implications for the emerging global order. The research relies on both primary and secondary data, with a predominant emphasis on secondary sources. Data are analyzed using thematic analysis, enabling the systematic identification and comparison of core strategic themes shaping US and Chinese policies in the Indo-Pacific. The study employs a comparative framework to assess how both states pursue their 21st-century international agendas. The temporal scope focuses on the post-2008 period, marked by China’s accelerated rise and the intensification of strategic rivalry with the United States. This timeframe provides critical context for understanding contemporary power transitions and strategic behavior in the Indo-Pacific region

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a focal point of strategic competition between the United States and China. As both powers compete for influence, dominance and security in this strategically significant region, their policies are shaped by distinct theoretical approaches to international relations. The present study aims to examine these policies through two contrasting theoretical frameworks. First, Offensive Realism, applied to analyze the US policies and secondly, the English School of Thought, used to understand China’s approach in the Indo-Pacific Region.

The choice of Offensive Realism for the United States and the English School for China reflects the fundamental differences in how these powers approach international relations. Offensive Realism, grounded in the realist tradition, emphasizes the importance of maximization of power and survival in an anarchic international system. It assumes that great powers are primarily concerned with maximizing their relative power to ensure their survival and dominance. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant for understanding the US strategies in the Indo-Pacific region, where the US perceives China’s rise as a direct challenge to its established hegemony.

On the other hand, the English School of Thought, which offers a more nuanced view of international relations, emphasizes the existence of an international society where states are bound by shared norms, rules and institutions. While acknowledging the anarchic nature of the international system, the English School argues that cooperation, diplomacy and the pursuit of order are critical for maintaining global stability. This theoretical perspective is well-suited to analyze China’s strategies in the Indo-Pacific, where China presents itself as a responsible power advocating for a multipolar world order, aiming for “shared future”, seeking to reform, rather than dismantle the existing international system.

Therefore, the rise of China has led to a distribution of power, challenging the existing balance dominated by the United States. This power shift has resulted in competition and the pursuit of power. The United States, as an established hegemon, is seeking to maintain its influence, while China seeks to increase its own. This power struggle is central to understand Washington’s policies in the region. Hence, the growing influence of China in the Indo-Pacific can often be perceived as a threat to the US hegemony. Conversely, the ever-increasing military presence and alliances of the US are often perceived as containment by China, creating a security dilemma between the two great powers. Therefore, the United States has long sought to maintain its position as the dominant

power. Since the end of WWII, the US has established a network of alliances and military partnerships throughout the region, ensuring its ability to project power and influence regional dynamics. Offensive Realism explains why the United States views China's rapid economic and military rise as a strategic threat, prompting policies aimed at containing or balancing China's influence. The US initiatives to strengthen its strategic partnership and increase military presence reflect the US strategic calculus to maintain its dominance and prevent China from achieving regional hegemony is a natural consequence of an anarchic international system. Hence, strengthening existing alliances of the US with Japan and Australia while forging strategic partnership with India and Southeast Asian countries to contain China's influence in the region is driven by a neo-realistic perspective of balancing against the rising power.

While the United States operates through the lens of power maximization, China's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific can be better understood through the lens of the English School of Thought. Instead of seeking outright dominance through military might, China has framed its rise as a "peaceful" process aimed at creating a "harmonious world" or a "community with shared future". This is evident in China's engagement with multilateral institutions like ASEAN and the mega Belt and Road Initiative, which promotes infrastructure development and economic connectivity. Furthermore, one of the key pillars of BRI is that it is inclusive and open for all, paved a new way for collective human modernization and supports the vision of building a Global Community of Shared Future (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2023, 5).

China's approach to the Indo-Pacific aligns closely with the English School's pluralist tradition that prioritizes state sovereignty and the peaceful co-existence of diverse politico-economic systems within international society. Hence, instead of promoting a single universal model of governance, China has consistently emphasized the legitimacy of multiple development paths and political arrangements. In this context, Beijing's advocates for a multipolar "international" order reflects its preference for a more diffused distribution of power among major states and greater normative diversity at the global level. Consequently, China's strategy is best understood not as an effort to dismantle the existing international order but as a calculated attempt to reshape prevailing norms and institutions in ways that better accommodate its interests, values and status within the international system (Jiechi 2015, 16).

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

The United States and China pursue distinct long-term strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The core objective of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region is to contain China by providing strategic alternatives and maintaining their supremacy in the region. Moreover, in response to shared concerns related to China's growing influence by Japan, Australia and India, the US aims to strengthen its network of allies and partners in the region to counterbalance China's growing military presence in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, one of the key strategic objectives of the United States is to contain China from challenging the US sea power in the Indo-Pacific. In other words, the United States aims to cut off China's "maritime silk road" (Yale, 2015) so that China can expand only through the "economic belt" on land, which Chinese often refers to as "Malacca Dilemma" (Paszak, 2021). Therefore, the key strategic objective of the United States is to contain China and promote "rules-based international order" through economic, security and diplomatic means.

China, in contrast, has criticized the US Indo-Pacific strategy as “resurrecting the Cold War mentality and bloc politics.” (Zhang, 2022). While China’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific integrates both economic and security factors, it is fundamentally rooted in geo-economics. Beijing’s long-term strategic objectives includes economic integration, defending sovereignty and territorial integrity of State, and control over important Sea lines of Communication (SLOCs) (China’s Military Strategy 2015, 16). In the geo-economics context, China has launched mega-initiatives like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) to advance its economic interests. On the other hand, China is modernizing its military capabilities and building artificial islands to secure its economic interests. Geopolitically, China is engaging primarily with semi-periphery countries that shares coastline with Indian Ocean in order to build close economic ties, dominate economically and gain strong control in Indian Ocean by building ports. Furthermore, China’s strategic posture towards the South China Sea, often known as nine-dash line represents China’s core policy on territorial integrity and sovereignty. President Xi stated that the period extending to 2020 and beyond represents a “strategic opportunity” for China. To achieve its long-term objective, China must prioritize domestic stability and development. Externally, it should foster strong relationships with neighboring states by building close economic ties, engaging in effective diplomacy and enhancing security cooperation. In a nutshell, China seeks to make its regional environment safer and treat its neighbors as friends. However, President Xi clarified that pursuing a friendly neighborhood policy does not imply compromising China’s national interests, sovereignty, or territorial integrity, which remain paramount in its priorities.

Military and Security Policies

The United States security policies in the Indo-Pacific region are driven by its core strategic objectives of maintaining the regional primacy. The US security policies reflects the principles of offensive realism as it seeks to maximize its power for regional dominance and counter the growing influence of China. The military and security dimension has been a prominent agenda in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy from Obama’s “Pivot to Asia” to Biden’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”.

The US military strategy has three main pillars: enhancing the US military presence in the region, increasing the flexibility towards deployment of US forces and enhancing the military capabilities of the key allies to strengthen defense partnership.

In order to enhance its military presence, the United States has established permanent and rotational access military bases in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Philippines, Diego Garcia, Guam and Australia. The United States operates or has access to over 30 bases and facilities in the Indo-Pacific region. One of key objectives to establish permanent or has rotational access is to conduct Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) against China’s maritime claims in the South China Sea (Sharman, 2020). Moreover, the United States initiated the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept to tackle Anti Access/Anti-Denial challenges posed by China (US Department of Defense, 2013, p. 06). Furthermore, in 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), the United States formally declared China as the strategic competitor. Thus, the US renamed Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command and assigned 375,000 military and civilian personnel (Garamone, 2018).

To enhance the military capabilities of key allies and strengthening strategic partnership, the United States signed multiple bilateral defense pacts and established various multilateral

frameworks. Bilaterally, the US signed three significant defense pacts with India, Logistics-Exchange Memorandum Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and signed Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). Similarly, the US signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with Philippines, new defense guidelines with Japan and a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Papua New Guinea. Multilaterally, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and Australia, UK and US Trilateral Partnership (AUKUS) are the leading frameworks. However, the United States signed various other multilateral agreements that includes Compacts of Free Associations (COFA) with Freely Associated States (FAS) and the US, Japan, Korea Trilateral Cooperation. Lastly, United States signed Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) and National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for the defense spending among the key allies. Among all the allies and partners in Indo-Pacific, India is considered as a "key strategic ally" of the United States to contain China's growing regional influence (Saha, 2023).

China's military modernization and policies have been formally discussed in CPC congress and White Papers. China's military policies designed to safeguard national security, integrity, sovereignty to support the peaceful rise. The White Papers language is quite positive and advocates for "shared future". President Xi during the 19th CPC Congress said that China's development will not threaten any nation; it neither has any aim to seek hegemony nor in expansionism. China aims to ensure the PLA meets medium- and long-term goals, including basic modernization by 2035 and a world-class military by mid-century.

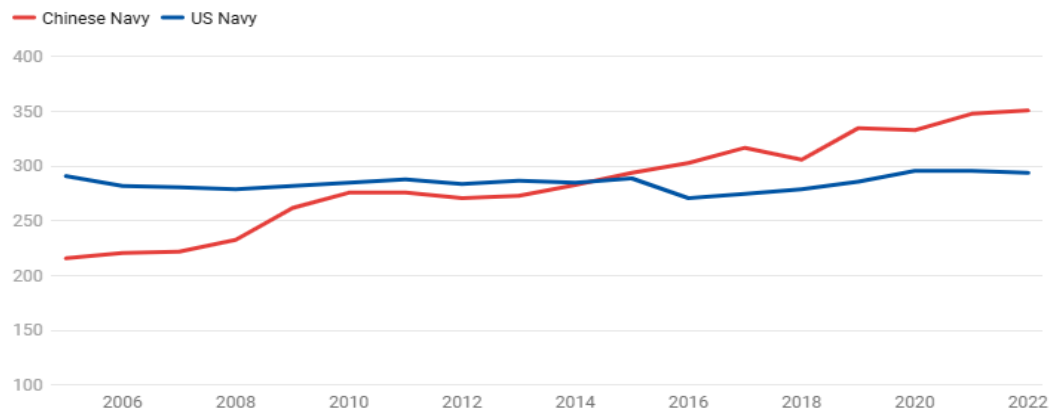
Nevertheless, China's leadership has consistently underscored the strategic importance of maritime power in safeguarding national interests. At the 18th Party Congress in 2012, then President Hu Jintao articulated the objective of transforming China into a "maritime power" to protect its maritime rights and interests. A core strategic ambition followed more assertively by his successor Xi Jinping. In 2018, President Xi emphasized the growing urgency of strengthening China's naval capabilities. This policy was further institutionalized in China's 2019 defense white paper, which illustrated the need to develop a modern and robust naval force capable of conducting far-seas operations (Information Office of the State Council, 2019).

Within this strategic framework, China's military modernization and the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea serve as instruments of deterrence, aimed primarily at limiting external, —particularly, Washington's intervention in China's near seas. Concurrently, Beijing has prioritized the development of counter-intervention and regional operational capabilities that aims to secure strategically vital maritime spaces such as the East China Sea and the South China Sea against perceived foreign interference.

The modernization of Chinese Navy has resulted in remarkable expansion in both force structure and operational reach. During the mid-1990s, China's surface fleet remained technologically limited, consisting of approximately 57 destroyers and frigates. However, only three of which were fitted with short-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system which demonstrates that much of the fleet highly exposed to modern anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) threats. The submarine arm was similarly underdeveloped and nearly three-quarters of China's roughly 80 attack submarines comprising aging Romeo-class platforms inherited from the Soviet era. Nevertheless, the subsequent decades witnessed rapid and sustained naval growth.

By 2015, the PLAN had surpassed the United States Navy (USN) in overall fleet size. Since then, China is world largest navy by the number of ships with over 750 vessels (Du, 2023). This assessment includes all Chinese active-duty, manned vessels exceeding 1,000 tons and armed with missile or torpedo systems that includes 22 missile-equipped corvettes that have recently been reassigned to the China Coast Guard. Notably, this figure excludes an additional 80 missile-armed small patrol craft operated by the PLAN. However, the commonly cited estimate of roughly 290 U.S. Navy “battle force ships” incorporates a broad range of combat logistics and support vessels. Of these 126 vessels including those operated by the Military Sealift Command fall into this category, compared to 167 equivalent vessels within the PLAN inventory (Nicholas et al., 2014).

Figure 1 Shifting Tides: China’s Naval Expansion



(Source: The Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS, 2023)

The PLAN has achieved significant advances in operational capability across various domains. In 2017, approximately 70% of the PLAN fleet was classified as “modern”. A significant increase compared to less than 50% in 2010. Thus, China has steadily prioritized larger and more capable surface combatants with advanced integrated weapons and sensor systems. A key milestone in this progression was the induction of the first Type 055 Renhai-class cruiser in 2019, a class with an estimated displacement of around 12,000–13,000 tons and 112 vertical launch system (VLS) cells that substantially enhance China’s air-defense, strike and command capabilities in blue-water operation. Furthermore, recent developments indicate continued expansion and technological refinement: additional Type 055 hulls are under construction and newer classes such as the Type 054B frigates and enhanced Type 052D destroyers remain central to fleet growth. This shows PLAN’s transition toward a more balanced and modern naval force structure capable of extended operations beyond East Asia. (Luck, 2025)

A key component of this approach is the development of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. These include ground- and air-launched cruise missiles, short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, advanced fighter jets, air refueling capabilities and integrated defense systems. While China can deploy these capabilities across the region, such as in disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with Japan, its primary objective is to delay or limit the US intervention in a potential conflict over the Taiwan Strait (Meraner, 2024). Moreover, in 2017, China established its first foreign military base in Djibouti (Vines et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the

United States and its allies considers China's military modernization and its strategic posture in the near seas as threat to regional order and a tool to gain regional dominance. However, it is important to note that despite the official statements of CPC leadership and declared military strategy of China, the military modernization and gradual expansion of China is creating a security dilemma and increasing turbulence in the South China Sea.

Economic Engagements

The economic dimension has remained a prominent component of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. However, the United States also faced major setbacks in the success of its Indo-Pacific strategy due to inconsistency in economic policies and initiatives. “

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) represented a key operational pillar of Obama's “Pivot” or “rebalancing Asia strategy.” The TPP was a multilateral agreement that aimed to reduce tariffs, establish common trade standards and counterbalance China's economic rise. Furthermore, TPP emphasized labor standards, environmental protections and intellectual property rights. Moreover, the Obama administration enhanced its engagement with the Indo-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the ASEAN” (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2016).

The questions raised regarding the US reliability in economic engagements in the region when Trump withdrew from the TPP, arguing that it failed to sufficiently benefit the United States. (Solís, 2022) This move created a vacuum that China sought to fill through initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The Trump administration promoted Bilateral trade agreements over multilateral initiatives. Moreover, Trump escalated a trade war with Beijing by imposing tariffs and restrictions on Chinese goods and investments. Furthermore, to counter China's BRI, the BUILD Act of 2018 established the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to support infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region (Runde & Bandura, 2018).”

As Democrats regained the charge of White House in 2021, the Biden administration re-emphasized on multilateralism instead of bilateral trade agreements marked another policy volatility. In 2022, it established Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEFP) platform to deepen economic cooperation with 14 regional countries. Furthermore, IPEF emphasized on standards for supply chains, clean energy, digital trade and anti-corruption to reduce reliance on China by providing alternatives (Freeman et al., 2022). The pendulum effect is evident in the Biden administration's multilateral approach in its economic engagements with the Indo-Pacific, shifting from the Trump's bilateral engagements. This policy shift underscores the recurring oscillation in US economic policy approaches between administrations with different strategic priorities. Nevertheless, despite inconsistent economic policies, each administration committed to promote “rules-based economic order” and counter China's economic rise in the region by providing alternatives to allies and partners “

In contrast, economic policies of China have served as cornerstone instrument for the pursuit of China's core strategic interests. The Belt and Road Initiative is Beijing's flagship economic strategy, which aims to enhance regional connectivity and cooperation among countries through infrastructure development and investment. The Maritime Silk Road of the BRI focuses on Indo-Pacific countries, promoting the development of ports such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong

in Bangladesh and Gwadar port in Pakistan. (Jie & Wallace, 2022). Furthermore, China also provides loans to Indo-Pacific states for highways, railways, ports and energy projects, which the west calls China's debt trap strategy. In addition, China has also signed ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA), and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP) to promote its economic interests with ASEAN member states and other regional countries, that includes Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. To further expand its economic engagements with Pacific Islands, China has initiated infrastructure projects and provided aid to Tonga, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Zhang, 2022). Therefore, in economic dimension, China has an edge over the United States as key allies and partners of US have joined hands with China in economic projects and part of China's vision "community with shared destiny". Hence, these economic policies are key drivers of China's vision of "Pax Sinica" order in the region. Thus, the concept of global community and continuous claims of not seeking hegemony and peaceful coexistence of multiple powers in the international system reflects the core principle of English School of thought that advocates for international society and the coexistence of diverse political and economic systems.

The 21st Century Great Powers Competition: A New Cold War?

During the Cold War era, two super powers competed on the ideological basis. The Western bloc, under the umbrella of the United States was promoting capitalism while the USSR was aiming to spread communism. Nevertheless, after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, China, maintaining a socialist economy, adjusted its economic system, market mechanisms and aligned it with the West. In fact, all major global economies opted for the liberalization of their respective markets and became part of the US-led Western Economic System. Presently, China and US remain deeply economically interdependent. The US-led West maintains greater investment in China, while China maintains even greater investment in the Western market. In 2023, China was the fourth-largest U.S. trading partner (\$575 billion). The U.S. exported \$147.8 billion goods and imported \$427.2 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). In September 2024, total trade between China and US stood at \$54.33 including \$11.26 billion in export and about \$43.07 billion in import (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

Hence, the contemporary great power competition does not constitute an existential ideological confrontation comparable to the cold war rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, as the ideological orientations and strategic objectives of the two actors are not inherently irreconcilable. China (for now) does not seek to overturn the US-led institutional order in its entirety, nor does it aim to dismantle the United States' position as a global hegemon. China aims something less than global hegemony, which is a global "multi-polarity" (Heer, 2020) in which power is distributed among the several major actors. Thus, the strategic competition between Washington and Beijing has the similarity to the US - Soviet Cold War but this similarity is superficial. The US and Soviet were competing for the superiority of their respective ideology and economic system whereas the US - China rivalry revolves around US-China dominance within the existing economic order.

At the international level, the US has traditionally relied on military power, security alliances and limited economic assistance, the establishment of military bases in the strategically significant regions, and at times, regime change to advance its objectives. On the other hand, China has adopted policy of trade, development and investment to pursue its interests.

In promoting and advancing multi-polarity, China seeks to legitimize its approach to trade, development and governance without forcibly imposing its model on other nations. This is encapsulated in what China refers to as a “community of common destiny for mankind.”

Apparently, China does not seek to dismantle existing economic order, instead, China aims to refine the existing framework of economic order by introducing Chinese characteristics of “Shared destiny” or “win-win cooperation” and avoid confrontation or intervention in domestic affairs.

Therefore, the challenges posed by China were effectively and concisely articulated by renowned Chinese scholar Wu Xinbo, who aptly summarized the situation by stating “China does not pose an existential threat to the United States, yet it does threaten to dilute the hegemony of the US, share its global leadership role and demonstrate an alternative to its development and governance model” (Xinbo 2020, 110).

Trajectories and Implications for a New World Order

The dynamics of the World Order have changed dramatically since the Post-WWII era, from the bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union that characterized Cold War, to an era of unipolarity, after the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991. With the rise of new powers, particularly China, the global power dynamics are once again shifting towards multi-polarity, posing significant challenges to the US-led unipolar world order. Currently, the world order is in transitional phase where Indo-Pacific region is strategic theater among the great powers. On the one hand, the United States, as an established power seeks to sustain their hegemony. On the other hand, China emerged as giant economic and military power challenging the US dominance through its economic engagements, new multilateral frameworks and modernization of its military capabilities. China consistently asserts that its rise is peaceful. However, historically, any shift in the International order have often been accompanied by instability and conflict. Nevertheless, the dynamics of conflict in the 21st century are likely to differ, with a high probability of avoiding major direct confrontations among great powers. The following section outlines the key challenges and possible scenarios for emerging world order.

From Pax-Americana to Pax Sinica

Pax-Americana refers to the period of relative tranquility and stability led by the United States in the post-war era. This era was characterized by US dominance in shaping global institutions, norms and economic systems. The key features of Pax Americana include the US military supremacy and its global network including North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and bilateral security agreements. Furthermore, the Bretton Woods system established US dominance over global finance, with the US dollar as the reserve currency and institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organization (WTO) promoting liberal economic policies. Moreover, the promotion of liberal democratic values, human rights and rule-based international order extended U.S. ideological influence. In addition, the US soft power and its central role in the age of globalization remained the prominent features of Pax Americana. However, the emergence of China and its transnational initiatives like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) have provided alternatives to the US-led World Order and challenged the Pax Americana order (Layne, 2018).

Pax Sinica, on the other hand, refers to the China's vision of global governance. It advocates for 'win-win cooperation' or formally "Community with Shared Future", and upholds respect for state sovereignty through non-interference in domestic affairs of any sovereign country. China is currently world's second largest economy and the largest trading partner for more than 120 countries (Green, 2023). Furthermore, initiatives like BRI, and institutions like AIIB are the key drivers of Pax-Sinica order. It has not only expanded China's influence but also serve as alternatives to US-led economic frameworks. In addition, China's advancements in emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, 5G, quantum computing and green energy position it as a leader in the global tech race (Gordon & Nouwens, 2022). Hence, by promoting digital infrastructure through the "Digital Silk Road," China exports its technologies and regulatory norms to the developing world. Moreover, China's growing military power and its assertive posture in the South China Sea indicate Beijing's ambitions to dominate regional and global security affairs.

Therefore, the transition from Pax Americana to Pax Sinica world is the central theme of 21st century geopolitics. China has made significant strides toward reshaping the global order through its own vision of Shared future or non-zero-sum politics. Whether Pax Sinica emerges as a dominant paradigm or as one component of a multipolar world order will depend on how China navigates the challenges posed by the United States and its regional allies in the Indo-Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics driving the rise and fall of empires have evolved to encompass new dimensions of statecraft, including geo-economics, geopolitics, geostrategic, diplomacy, warfare and technology. Historically, the transition from one Pax to another have produced two key shifts. First, it altered the very nature of the global system. Second, it integrated elements of the previous order by either refining its framework or building upon its foundations. Hence, such transitions result in either a new system with entirely new rules or a new system that adapts and continues the old rules.

Therefore, the United States is likely to remain the dominant power but not unilaterally, as other powers will join hands to shape the geopolitical and geo-economics affairs of the world with new set of rules and norms. China is poised to take the leading role in geo-economic affairs. However, rather than completely dismantling the liberal Institutional Order, China will refine the existing economic framework by introducing Chinese characteristics of "Shared destiny" or win-win cooperation, while emphasizing non-confrontation and non-intervention in domestic affairs. Pax-Sinica order will be focused on geo-economics and will not pay attention to internal political dynamics of any sovereign country. Consequently, the liberal institutional order would sustain, albeit with new rules and norms.

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