



**US-China Security Competition in South Asia:
Repercussions for the Regional Security Dynamics**

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Abstract:

As the US and China's strategic rivalry intensifies, the security and economic landscape of South Asia, a region important to both powers' long-term interests, is being transformed. As the world is going towards multi-polarity, the deteriorating US-China relations have created conditions that resemble a power transition in the twenty-first century. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US-backed Quad are also shaping these strategic calculations, regional alignments, and policymaking. South Asian states will have to adjust their foreign policies by either balancing or bandwagoning to take advantage of economic opportunities and security partnerships while minimizing over-dependence on either great power. This contest will have major consequences in the region. The competition offers potential economic and strategic advantages but also entails risks of polarization, destabilization, and strategic uncertainty. To understand these pertinent issues, this paper addresses the following questions: How is the US-China strategic rivalry redefining the security structure in South Asia? What are the security and economic impacts of this contention on the South Asian states? And what policy alternatives can regional actors have to deal with the great-power competition and retain strategic independence and regional stability?

Keywords: South Asia, BRI, US-China rivalry, regional stability, security dynamics, great-power competition, power transition

INTRODUCTION

In the growing competition between the US and China, South Asia has become a new battlefield. The region is located at the confluence of major land and sea routes. Due to its nuclearized security environment, long-standing interstate rivalries, and proximity to the Indian Ocean, a vital global trade and energy artery, the region is geopolitically important. As the US-China tussle intensifies across the Indo-Pacific, South Asia is increasingly affected by the recalibration of both powers, with direct consequences for regional stability (Ramos, 2025).

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The US sees South Asia (particularly India) as an important pillar of its Indo-Pacific strategy to preserve the favourable balance of power (Scott, 2018). Cooperation in defense, intelligence sharing between India and Washington, and the transfer of emerging military technologies are ways Washington seeks to strengthen India's military capabilities and strategic posture. The growing partnership of the US, Australia, and Japan is aimed at checking China's growing influence in Asia, but has changed the power asymmetries in the region. As a counterbalance, China has increased its activity in South Asia, mainly through geo-economic and strategic engagement, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a flagship project of this strategy, which will enhance Sino-Pakistani cooperation and enable Pakistan to develop countermeasures to India's growing conventional and technological advantages.

These co-linearities create a quadrilateral security architecture among the US, China, India, and Pakistan, in which people see the US-India planned partnership as India's attempt to contain Chinese power. In contrast, the China-Pakistan planned partnership counterbalances the US-India axis, which people perceive as threatening the security of China and Pakistan. Washington and Beijing are not looking toward direct conflict in South Asia, but their competing strategies are increasingly shaping states' military choices in ways that may have unforeseen, destabilizing consequences (Ramos, 2025). Such calculated entanglement may cause an arms race, crises to become unstable, and hostilities to escalate between India's and Pakistan's conventional and nuclear forces, both of whom are nuclear-armed adversaries that have fought wars against each other.

The paper seeks to address the US-China rivalry's impact on the evolution of a Cold War-type structure in South Asia and the implications of such a structural change for the region's planned environment. The paper also seeks to document the evolution of US-China planned competition in South Asia. How might it imply changes in India-Pakistan relations and, more broadly, secure the region?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current literature on the US-China tussle takes South Asia as a significant but under-theorized venue of great-power competition. Zafar Khan theorizes the influence of the Sino-American rivalry in the region based on the quadrilateral system of relations among the US, China, India, and Pakistan (Khan, 2022). He posits that America's offshore balancing policy vis-à-vis India and the geo-economic and strategic connection between China and Pakistan through the BRI overlap to produce several security dilemmas. But, at the same time, this inhibits the escalation process because of the great power interests. Though the alignment patterns put forward by Khan are insightful for structural interpretation, his analysis is mostly state-centered and descriptive, as it does not shed light on how competing strategies change regional security patterns and escalation behaviour over time. David Ramos goes further to place South Asia in the wider context of a power shift from unipolarity to a more pluralistic international system (Ramos, 2025). His work focuses on balancing and bandwagoning reactions by regional states, as well as threats of expedited weapon procurement and economic disruption through foreign competition. Nevertheless, Ramos only addresses South Asia as a passive field of systemic forces, rather than as an interactive security dilemma shaped by domestic rivalries and threat perceptions. Wen Zha highlights the dubiousness in regional strategic decisions concerning Sino-American competition, especially on the issue of

hedging behaviour and the changing power dynamics (Zha, 2023), whereas Shengli Ling illustrates that the reaction of alliances in the Asia-Pacific is positional and relies on sensitivity and vulnerability instead of the formation of irreversible blocks (Ling, 2025). Nicholas Khoo supports the significance of regional agency but emphasizes the existence of great-power rivalry as a structural prerequisite (Khoo, 2022). Despite these studies offering practical, theoretical, and comparative approaches, they mostly treat the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia as privileged cases. The existing literature, therefore, considers the alignment strategies, the politics of alliances, and power transition separately, and does not factor in the interplay of the US-China security conflict and the particularities of South Asian competition. This study fills this gap by examining how the competition among great powers redefines regional security relationships, perceptions of threats, and stability in South Asia, thereby linking systemic rivalry to regional security performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is qualitative, based on a systematic literature review and discourse analysis. Secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy studies from credible think tanks are used. The paper follows a thematic research design in which the major dimensions of great power competition are measured. Using critical discourse analysis, official documents, scholarly articles, and policy papers, this study analyzes the role of rivalry between US and Chinese security discourses in shaping regional security behaviour in South Asia. In its comparative-analytical approach, the study seeks to identify continuities and changes in regional security processes, especially in the patterns of external alignment and the rivalry between Pakistan and India. This methodological approach allows for the creation of trends and patterns of interaction and strategic implications arising from great power competition, and places South Asia as an interactive security complex affected by both systemic and regional forces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neorealism, also known as structural realism, is a prominent theory of international relations developed by Kenneth Waltz, particularly articulated in his seminal work *Theory of International Politics* (1979) (Waltz, 1979). The theory argues that states' behavior is primarily shaped by the anarchic structure of the international system rather than by domestic politics or ideological preferences. In the absence of a central authority, states must rely on self-help to ensure their survival, leading them to prioritize security and relative power. Neorealism emphasizes the distribution of capabilities among states as the key determinant of international outcomes, explaining why states engage in balancing behavior, alliance formation, and military competition. According to this theory, power shifts, especially the rise of a new major power, generate insecurity and intensify competition, often producing security dilemmas even when states act defensively.

Regarding the US-China rivalry in the South Asian theatre, neorealism provides a useful framework for explaining how US-China strategic rivalry is redefining South Asian security relations (Zhang, 2022). With China changing the regional and international balance of power through its growing economic and military power, the United States aims to maintain its strategic position through offshore balancing, primarily by elevating India as a regional counterbalance. The growing defense collaboration between India and the United States is a logical response to structural forces that have led to China's emergence. On the other hand, the accelerating strategic and economic

collaboration that China is developing with Pakistan, especially through military-economic integration under the Belt and Road Initiative, is a balancing measure against the US-India alignment. As Pakistan continues to have security dilemmas with India, it finds itself on the same side as China to increase its comparative strength and deterrence. These alignments create a quadrupolar security arrangement within a neorealist framework, guided by systemic requirements rather than intentional escalation. Though this is meant to boost security by deterring, the struggles by the two regional powers to gain a competitive edge add to the security dilemma, adding to the threats of an arms race, sustaining a destabilized crisis, and unintended escalation between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

US-CHINA SECURITY COMPETITION IN SOUTH ASIA

The world is going towards multi-polarity as a result of rising Chinese power, resurgence of Russia and emergence of potential other actors on the global politics. The power transition is accompanied with the deteriorating US-China relations. The US and China's strategic rivalry is increasingly intensifying with significant implications for the security and economic landscape of South Asia, a region important to both powers' long-term interests. In this context, it is imperative to explore how is the US-China strategic rivalry redefining the security structure in South Asia? What are the security and economic impacts of this contention on the South Asian states? And what policy alternatives can regional actors have to deal with the great-power competition and retain strategic independence and regional stability?

US Strategic Engagement in South Asia

The United States' strategic involvement in South Asia is mainly fueled by the great-power rivalry with China, which makes the sub-region one of the attack points in the bigger picture of the Indo-Pacific theater, in other words. This competition has controlled a powerful realignment of the foreign policy of Washington.

Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Role of India

The US recognizes the Indo-Pacific as a region to protect its long-term security and economic interests. US policymakers see the rapid rise of China as a key threat to the primacy of the US as a major economic power (Vashisht, 2023; Ali et. al., 2016). As a result, the US has intensified its relationship with India and other regional players to offset China's growing influence. India is also becoming a critical strategic ally and a crucial hub to achieve balance in the Indo-Pacific. The US considers India to be an option that can establish a favorable balance of power to counter China's influence in the region. This new direction of US policy towards South Asia, characterized by strengthening of alliances with New Delhi, has been characterized as an India First priority, though the term has not been made public.

QUAD, Defense Agreements, and Cooperation

The work on the renewal of the QUAD, a US-India, Japan, and Australia alliance, is one of the main signs of this operational alignment. The Quad is also intended to combat the rising Chinese influence, ensure regional stability, and create an environment of rules, and these discussions are largely seen as an attempt to address the Chinese regional aspirations.

The US is enhancing the defense capabilities of its allies, especially India, in the event of Chinese aggression. Washington has approved India as a Major Defense Partner and has signed agreements such as the Industrial Exchange MOU. The US offers financial aid and military assistance, particularly to India, to bolster its defense capabilities and develop a positive balance of power in the region (Wei, 2022). This is a strategic collusion where weapons are sold and is aimed at taking advantage of the emerging Indian hegemony to curtail Chinese aggression.

US Approach Towards Pakistan and Afghanistan

The US is in a complicated situation, balancing its strategic relations with India, its security obligations, and its historical association with Pakistan (Muzaffar et al., 2021; Ahmad, 2013). Despite Pakistan's continuing relevance in counterterrorism cooperation, there is a tendency for its strong economic and security relations with China, as exemplified by the CPEC, to make the situation in the region more challenging. According to US policy analysts, deepening relations with India take precedence over Pakistan, which may reassert its strategic stance, thereby limiting intelligence sharing and collaboration with Washington, especially regarding policy choices in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the historical closeness of this country to the Soviet Union and China made Afghanistan a strategic location. With the US troops pulling out and the resultant humanitarian crisis, the unstable internal environment is likely to become a battleground between US global powers in renewed proxy wars, given the result of the humanitarian crisis (Liaqat & Abbasi, 2023). Nonetheless, both the US and China are interested in stabilizing Afghanistan's political and economic systems.

Emphasis on Maritime Security and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Indian Ocean region (IOR) is a key region, as South Asia lies at a major trade hub. Nearly every sea route is vital to the US, and, as such, it is important to ensure that the IOR is dominated by the US Navy to protect its Indo-Pacific strategy (Hashmi et al., 2023). The vast economic and military policy by China, such as the introduction of dual-purpose infrastructure along the coast of the IOR, allows the management of logistics and possible military reach to Beijing. This tussle of power over the Indian Ocean is a reason behind ongoing security tensions between China and India. The IOR is a classical battlefield where the balance of power will be determined because of the importance of the maritime passages between the Pacific and Indian oceans in the operation of the US Navy.

China's Expanding Security and Economic Footprint in South Asia

The growing security and economic presence of China in South Asia is a key characteristic of the international strategic competition with the United States. Beijing sees the South Asian sub-region as a prime force to protect its long-term security and economic interests. Economic integration, building of infrastructure, and defense alliances are some of the methods that China employs in order to expand its influence and control and limit the existence of other competing states, especially the US and India (Malik et al., 2025).

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Strategic Connectivity

A major instrument of China's strategic expansion is the BRI, which underscores the country's intention to integrate large areas into its economic domain. BRI has a desired goal of establishing a

unified economic route both inside and across Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific, which would possibly overhaul the international economy and institutional conventions. The BRI is defined as a geographically dispersed network among various countries as it focuses on giant infrastructure projects to ensure that it galvanizes trade and investment in partner countries and thus stands out as development-oriented, compared to the alternatives. Nepal and Bangladesh are the countries that have become part of the BRI structure (Хакимов, 2024). The BRI strategy of China is considered to be potentially a significant geo-economic and geopolitical scheme aimed at luring Eurasia and Africa into the configuration of a unicentric Chinese economic system (Liaqat & Abbasi, 2025).

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a Strategic Asset

CPEC is the most prominent element of the BRI and the primary source of conflict in the region. CPEC involves the development of advanced transport routes, energy initiatives, and special economic zones, which will enhance connectivity and strengthen bilateral relations. The project makes Pakistan an integral part of the wider idea of Beijing on regional connectivity and global economic integration. CPEC is considered a strategic linkage of China to the Arabian Sea, and through the process, the country is literally surrounded by India (Rahman et al., 2021). It is deemed highly unlikely that Islamabad would alienate itself in the sphere of Beijing despite souring but long-standing relations with Washington owing to its strategic importance and Pakistan's security issues with India.

China's Relations with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives

China is aggressively strengthening its ties with various actors in the region through trade and strategic investment. To strengthen security goals, China offers economic and military support to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to enhance its presence in the region. China has good trade ties with Nepal and the Maldives. Other nations that are now the greatest targets of massively investing Chinese economic activities are Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Ranade, 2024; Naazer 2018). China is enhancing the trade and military ties between Nepal and Sri Lanka (Abbasi & Liaqat, 2024).

Dual-Use Infrastructure and Port Diplomacy

One of the key features of the Chinese approach is the creation of the dual-use infrastructure and the adoption of port diplomacy, often called the network String of Pearls (Degang, 2018). The scheme for strategic ports in the Indian Ocean aims to safeguard Chinese political and economic interests, secure and export energy, project power, and oppose US involvement in the area. Such ports as Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka allow coastal access to the logistics and, possibly, military of the IOR. The deep-water seaport in Gwadar, which is close to the Strait of Hormuz, will become a naval base in the Indian Ocean and enable China to be in control of the US and Indian activities. Military bases and artificial islands, combined with dual-use infrastructure, are all improving the logistical and operational capabilities of China.

Military Cooperation and Arms Sales

China is enhancing its alliances in South Asia through various forms of military and security collaboration (Shambaugh, 2004). This entails the military and security aid, strategy alliances, naval bases, provision of arms, and technology to such nations as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and

Nepal. China has always been a solid diplomatic and economic ally to Pakistan, where it has played a crucial role in cases of crisis, as well as in defense. An example could be the way Pakistan has obtained financing and technological support related to its civilian nuclear development, including the Chashma nuclear complex with the help of China, and its self-manufactured tanks and fighter jets with foreign aid. An essential aspect of the Chinese overall strategy of countering the US influence in the region is military agreements, as well as selling arms.

Repercussions of US-China Competition for Regional Security Dynamics

The escalating strategic rivalry between the United States and China destabilizes South Asian security, and the possibility of a new Cold War increases, further destabilizing the region's already fragile geopolitical equilibrium (Ramos, 2025). With the international system gradually being transformed to a more pluralistic distribution of power, South Asia opens up as a decisive theater in which the ramifications of this great-power conflict will be established in the next few decades. Such competition compels the regional states to tune their foreign policies and adapt to balancing or bandwagoning policies according to the external encouragements and pressures. The consequences are felt in the military, economic, and political spheres.

Intensification of India–Pakistan Rivalry

The first security implication is the most pronounced polarization of the old enmity between Pakistan and India (Khan, 2022). The US perceives India as a crucial strategic ally and one of the key prongs to preserving the balance in the Indo-Pacific through its utilization of India to limit the ambition of China. This closer relation with New Delhi is considered an obligation to offset the alleged weakening of US hegemony.

On the other hand, the escalation of economic relations and security relations between Pakistan and China, which is reflected in the massive investments under the CPEC, binds Islamabad to firmly reside in the camp of Beijing. Considering that Pakistan has security issues with India and its rising economic dependence on China, Islamabad is hardly expected to alienate Beijing. The bilateral relationship has been raised to a high level because of the enormous investments made by China.

This relationship poses a danger of drawing these regional rivals into either respective block of the new Cold War, which will create a scenario that poses a threat to the balance in the region. The destabilizing nature of increased major power rivalry is feared by both New Delhi and Islamabad (Akram et al., 2025). The Indian root caused by the US has created fears that Pakistan will review its posture to limit any counterterrorism collaboration and exchange of intelligence with Washington, especially in Afghanistan policy. The competition maximizes the possibilities of a new Cold War and associated post-Cold War in South Asia.

Strategic Instability and Arms Modernization

Amid geopolitical rivalry, the established conventional and strategic arms-buying rat race is accelerating at present, exacerbating the existing socio-economic vulnerabilities that are a consequence of external alignments (Lo, 2025). The US is supplying its allies, especially India, by providing military equipment and strategic weapons in order to increase the power of defense and establish a favourable balance of power to act against the increasing influence of China. The further enhancement of this orientation towards the US and acquisition of sophisticated weapon systems

continues to feed the further intensification of the situation in the region and exposes Pakistan to more threats.

In turn, China is consolidating its alliances, including those with Pakistan, through strategic alliances, arms supply, and technology transfers (Baig, 2022). The standoff between the US and China is directly adding to the arms buildup in the region, making the instability worse. The US's military assistance is mainly to create a plausible minimum deterrence to match China's increasingly growing influence in the region. This is a growing competition in armaments that is putting both China and the US under budgetary pressure, which is a major impact of a new cold war.

Nuclear Deterrence, Escalation Risks, and Crisis Stability

The competition brings certain and significant risks to the strategic stability and management of crises in an area where two nuclear nations exist, India and Pakistan. Competition is also intensifying, raising serious concerns about the possibility of expanding conflict.

The fact that the emerging tensions might develop into a new version of the Cold War has dramatic consequences for strategic stability, which may result in further polarisation and strategic indecision. The security relations between strategic alliances, the economic interests, and regional rivalries are likely to dominate the long-term security dynamics of the years to come (Muzaffar & Khan, 2022).

The geopolitical pressures are already deteriorating the strategic stability of South Asia. It is in the common interest of all the major world powers to ensure that a conventional major highway war does not fall out to result in a nuclear fallout or loss of nuclear material to a third-party nation. There is the danger that the regional rivals will be driven into opposing camps, thus increasing the tension and chances of a clash in an already security-sensitive region.

Militarization of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is particularly important for its location as a major trade route by sea, which has become one of the main reasons for military rivalry in the region (Rodrigo, 2021).

The strategic building of a web of strategic ports and dual-use infrastructure covering the IOR, stretching this time, between China, on one side, and the Horn of Africa, on the other, is commonly referred to as the String of Pearls strategy of China. The aim of this network is to retain the energy imports to China, hedge its maritime routes to trade, generate power, and maybe to counter the US dominance in the area. Pakistan Ports such as Gwadar (close to the Strait of Hormuz) and Hambantota in Sri Lanka offer a two-purpose usage of ports that allow both logistics and the potential military presence to China. Gwadar will be a naval base, and this will enable China to keep an eye on the activities of the US and India.

The US can reciprocate this by ensuring the protection of major sea lanes within the Indian Ocean in order to sustain its naval hegemony as a way of addressing its Indo-Pacific strategy. Even such strategic groupings as the QUAD, including the US, India, Japan, and Australia, are largely viewed as counteractions to the Chinese regional ambitions. This rising Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean poses a great challenge to the US and Indian interests. The modernization program of China's navy

is expected to have its fleet of ships most modernized by the mid-2030s, such that it becomes the largest and most modernized marine fleet in the world.

Economic Dependencies and Political Influence

Geo-economic strategies have driven the competition in South Asia, and frequently, these are based on economic integration and large-scale investment projects. China leverages its economic influence, often through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to gain influence and create dependencies. BRI, and especially CPEC, is also a mechanism to enhance regional connectivity and ensure that China is being presented as a significant trade and investment partner (Ullah & Sufyan, 2025).

Nevertheless, many economic activities experienced in China are so intertwined with the world supply chains that any US attempt to achieve economic containment policies is difficult and expensive. One of the main risks is the fact that there may be an interruption of interstate trade and investment. Moreover, it spreads into a technological conflict over key aspects of high trends in the technology field, including artificial intelligence, 5G telecommunications, and semiconductors, and there is a risk of world division. Any interruption in the technology, capital, or component flow caused by US limitations on Chinese companies might have huge consequences for economic growth and innovations in South Asia.

The US moves to counter the economic initiatives of China by propagating alternatives whereby the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative could be geared towards being part of the US plan to resist the global-scope infrastructural projects of China. US officials also point out the economic threats of the BRI, namely, the problems of debt-trap that will face smaller nations participating in such projects.

Impact on Smaller South Asian States' Autonomy

The stiff competition forces the smaller states of the South Asian region to play complex games to secure their interests amid competition between the two great powers. These states are facing a dilemma between balancing and bandwagoning (Bhattarai & Bista, 2024).

Countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the key possible beneficiaries of Chinese economic investment on a large scale. The aim of these nations is to balance the economic gains of Chinese investment and, at the same time, highly defend the essential security relationships; this is likely to result in complicated balancing acts. Although Pakistan is closely allied to the nation of China, the country officially prefers being a neutral one and does not want the world to be divided into two camps.

The aggressive approach of rivalry makes the situation rather hostile to foreign policy independent formation. The foreign policies of states such as Nepal, Maldives, and Bangladesh, due to disagreements on whether to align with the West or the East through the US or China, may have their foreign policies pendulum swing between each other. This climate creates strategic possibilities but exposes regional countries to exposure in the event they grow overly dependent on either of the global powers. After all, the domestic political division of these smaller states can also be capitalized on by the great powers in soft competition on the platform of the media, educational courses, and development grants.

Policy Options and Strategies for South Asian States amid US–China Competition

In response to the threat of US-China strategic competition, South Asian states have a range of policy options to protect their security, economic interests, and regional stability.

Balancing and Bandwagoning

The strategies of South Asian states are aimed at balancing and bandwagoning in response to pressure from the United States and China, respectively (Roy, 2005). These nations maximize the benefits of taking advantage of Chinese economic investment and, at the same time, ensure strategic security relations with the US and its allies. Concurrently, they want to maintain a lack of reliance on one power and reduce their vulnerability, as well as not be overly dependent on any of the two leading actors.

Neutrality and Non-Alignment

One of the key strategic options that nations such as Pakistan have adopted is to remain neutral, as it does not take sides in the geopolitical alliances with the US or China (Ch et al., 2025). This is the strategy that enables regional states to dismiss pressures of uniting towards any anti-China or anti-US group whilst working towards the realization of positive relationships with various world powers, including the US, China, and Russia, thus protecting national interests and strategic independence.

Diplomatic and Economic Strategies

South Asian authorities aim to maintain key trade and investment relationships with the United States and China (Bano & Batool, 2024). One of the priorities is to manage infrastructure projects, that is, Chinese-financed ones, including BRI-related projects, in order to prevent overdependence on debt. Also, states strive to moderate institutional political disintegration, so that there is political stability, such that external actors can use the divide by applying soft power, such as media control, programs in educational institutions, or through development aid.

Mitigating Regional Instability

Because of the threats of US-China competition, various governments in the region consider cooperation in order to minimize strategic instability (Zha, 2023). Specifically, India and Pakistan are urged not to engage in another arms race, but instead to concentrate on bilateral trade and energy cooperation, and also connectivity programs. Construction of diplomatic mechanisms that reinforce multilateral norms, engage multiple actors in dialogue, and prefer sustainable development to zero-sum competition are also recommended to policymakers.

Promoting US–China Collaboration

Despite the strategic rivalry between Washington and Beijing, which is the major factor driving regional policy, South Asian states have the opportunity to promote cooperation between the two powers and address areas of mutual concern (Green & Gill, 2009). These are stabilizing Afghanistan, deterring nuclear weaponry proliferation, and other typical regional and worldwide issues. Encouraging diplomatic relations between the US and China could partially control rivalry and establish pragmatic engagement between the two countries, and indirectly lead to stability in the region.

CONCLUSION

The growing competition between the United States and China is shaping the strategic terrain of the South Asian Security Scenario, turning the region into a battlefield where the outlines of the post-unipolar world order will be drawn. It is not only a geopolitical rivalry based on the active intentions of China to gain a broad worldwide impact and seen as a challenge to the US primacy throughout the years, but also becoming, more specifically, a kind of Cold War of the twenty-first century. Although the current conflict shifts the emphasis from ideology to economy and technological superiority, it still seems to be a tremendous power tussle and strategic rivalry.

South Asia is not immune to the implications of these, and so a calibration is taking place in the region, with the likelihood of generating further strategic instability. The US has positioned itself closely with India as a necessary buttress to ensure balance in the Indo-Pacific, and hence the closer security and economic relationship. At the same time, it is deeply embedded in the Chinese economic and security circle as a result of colossal investments such as the CPEC, and thus it is very unlikely that Islamabad would sever its ties with Beijing. This risks propelling regional enemies into antagonistic blocs and intensifying the security threat, as well as the conventional and strategic acquisition of arms in the region.

Regional decision-makers need to overcome complicated balancing strategies to counter such risks. Finally, to ensure stability in the region, it is necessary to establish a diplomatic mechanism that is inclusive, stress the strengthening of multilateral norms, and focus on sustainable development rather than the zero-sum paradigm, maximizing the economic prospects, and preserving the security ties with the two rival powers. The ability of South Asian countries to cope with this intense competition will determine whether they will be stable and grow economically in the future.

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