

THE 21ST CENTURY WORLD ORDER AND PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The rise and fall of the great powers is one of the key driving forces of international politics. At the dawn of the 20th century, Pax-Britannica was the center of international politics but the 21st century unveiled with Pax-Americana as the pivot of global politics, where the US emerged as an uncontested hegemon of the unipolar world system. However, in its overstretched hegemonic commitments and hyper-power mania, the American economy bitterly suffered. Ultimately the rising powers especially, China, launched an enterprise to realign the contemporary world system to anything but the unipolar world. Pakistan, though not a claimant of the great power status; yet its geostrategic location in the South-West Asian heartland, awards it significance in the foreign policy goals of global powers. It is anticipated that in the changing global system, Pakistan would have an unavoidable relevance due to reciprocated relations with the US, growing ties with Russia and lasting strategic partnership with China.

Keywords: *Unipolar, Unilateralist, Multipolar, Declinism, Triumphalism*

Introduction

The cycle of rise and fall among the great powers is one of the major driving forces of transition in the global system. During the 20th century, the overall world order transformed from multipolarity to bipolarity and in the end to unipolar construction. Since the dawn of the 21st century, the US-led hegemonic world system has been consistently challenged by the rising powers that are dissatisfied and striving for the

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transition of world order to multipolar or multicentric international system. Amid this confrontational situation, a developing state like Pakistan, for its highly significant geostrategic position and the rapidly emerging new dynamics of international politics, can certainly have substantial implications in the future world system.

During the bipolar world, the United States and the Soviet Union, the leaders of Capitalist and Communist blocks, confronted each other in maintaining balance of power. However, after disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the US, in unipolar world order, relished an uncontested worldwide hegemony and there were not any serious calculations coming from any of its potential challengers. Washington aimed at enjoying the political, economic and strategic remunerations of its supremacy that was not only confessed but hailed by majority of states, including its traditional rivals. Kurt Andersen maintains that obviously the best decade ever in the recent American history was the 1990s,¹ the era of its "unipolar moment." The United States economy grew incredibly by displaying major drop in unemployment and poverty, in addition to around 1.7 million annual job opportunities and four percent annual growth rate.²

However, since the dawn of the 21st century, in its unilateralist approach and ambitious undertakings of hyper power, the US could not escape bearing massive political, economic and military encumbrances.³ Eventually, the United States could not avoid the marks of its declinism from hegemonic triumphalism.⁴ Simultaneously, the rising great powers are also striving to reshape the contemporary world system. Hence, the nature of engagement amid the emerging great powers and the declining superpower is deliberated as the pivot of 21st century world order, where strategically sanctified state like Pakistan may also come across serious challenges and solemn opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

The transformation of world order is a highly complex issue that demands an in depth study of international relations paradigms. The realist theory is certainly pertinent in analyzing the dynamics of world

¹ Kurt Andersen, "The Best Decade Ever? The 1990s, Obviously," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/opinion/sunday/the-best-decade-ever-the-1990s-obviously.html>

² James Pethokoukis, "Explaining the 1990s Economic Boom- Before Hillary Does," *AEIdeas*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.aei.org/publication/explaining-1990s-economic-boom-hillary/>

³ John Ikenberry, "Getting Hegemony Right: Analysis of the United States as a 'Hyper Power' Nation," *The National Interest*, 63, (Spring 2001), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2751/is_2001_Spring/ai/

⁴ David Calleo, "*Hegemony and Decline: Reflections on Recent American Experience*," Sens Public (2005): 2-8.

order and the role of great powers in maintaining or challenging the global system. The realist thinkers emphasize the quest of power, as being an inexorable driving force of states' undertakings in the international politics. In the past few decades the rapidly rising China has been maximizing its overall national power that is undeniably a serious concern for the American establishment in Washington and the Pentagon as well as a great challenge to its global hegemony, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.⁵ On the other hand the US is also confronting some serious challenges as the internal drivers of its declining hegemony like trade deficit, depreciating dollar and growing defense spending.⁶ The interplay amid the declining hegemon and the emerging great powers would be the pivot of the future world order.

The discourse of hegemonic powers and their roles in the world order also validates the hegemonic stability theory (HST), which upholds that the presence of a capable and committed hegemon in the global system usually results order and stability.⁷ The HST maintains that the hegemon helps in articulating and administering the rules of engagement among the key stakeholders of the global system. However, this argument better suits unipolarity, since in the bipolar and multipolar systems this paradigm falls short of substantial elucidation. At the same time, the Chinese claim for peaceful rise and lack of sizable empirical evidence of its capability and commitment for hegemonic designs also direct the debate from the hegemonic model to the power driven realist model.

However, the Sino-US enormous trade ties, their commitments to the key international organizations and the engagement of Pakistan with both the great powers also warrant relevance of the complex interdependence theory. The US and China are key strategic players in the Indian Ocean as well as Asia-Pacific region and despite their strategic rivalries the two great powers are the world's largest trading partners.⁸ The China's drive of investing billions of dollars worldwide investment and economic assistance plans for Pakistan also certifies the applicability of complex interdependence paradigm. Hence, the interplay of these triangulated relations amid the great powers – the US and China – and the developing country like Pakistan, entails greater diversity and complexity.

⁵ Christopher Layne, "Avoiding a Sino-American Confrontation," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 39, no. 4 (2015): 3-8.

⁶ Kalim Siddiqui, "The US Dollar and the World Economy: A Critical Review," *Athens Journal of Business & Economics* 6, no. 1 (2020): 21-44.

⁷ Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization* (1985): 579-614.

⁸ Hassan Farooq, and Muhammad Khan, "Sino-Russian Role in the 21st Century World Order," *Central Asia* 86, no. Summer (2020): 29-49.

Pakistan's Relevance in the Transforming World Order

Ever since the dawn of the 21st century, the rising players, mainly China and Russia, have been looking for the opportunities of maximizing their power and ultimately challenging the American supremacy. The geostrategic worth of some of the middle-rank states may also render them greater relevance in the future world system. Pakistan, though neither a claimant nor ambitious of great power status, still its geostrategic significance has generally been inescapable for the global powers. As a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, millions of Afghans fled to Pakistan making it the base camp for American weapons and proxy war instruments against the Soviets. Thousands of guerilla fighters from around the world were trained and transported into Afghanistan as *mujahedeen* and more than 80 percent of the coalition supplies reached Afghanistan through Pakistan.⁹ However, after the withdrawal of the Russian troops, Washington withdrew its military and economic assistance from Islamabad. In the post 9/11 era, once again Pakistan was awarded with the title of "frontline state" of the US-led 'War on Terror' campaign in Afghanistan.¹⁰ The economic and military assistance of Pakistan was not only restored but increased by manifold.¹¹

In regards to the future world system, the geostrategic position of Pakistan in the South-West Asian heartland, a region connecting the world's population and energy hubs at its West and East, renders the country a greater degree of significance. Recent developments in the region like; the Sino-Indian border clashes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the American drawdown from Afghanistan and its talks with Taliban, the growing tensions in the Middle East and China's drive of expanding its transnational influence; have charmed Pakistan at the center stage of regional dynamics among the great powers. The United States has repeatedly expressed its expectation that Pakistan's assistance is inexorable in pursuing the American interests in the region, particularly in the Kabul peace process. The rising power, China, also understands that its strategic ties with Pakistan can play a vital role in projecting China's future goals in the region and also world over.¹²

With the changing geopolitics and growing conflicts of interests

⁹ Bruce Riedel, "Pakistan's Role in the Afghanistan War's Outcome," *The Economist* (2010).

¹⁰ Lubna Sunawar, "Pakistan as a Frontline State in War against Terrorism: Cost & Benefit Analysis," *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, (2015): 43.

¹¹ Aid to Pakistan by the Numbers, "Pakistan: US Development Strategy," *Center for Global Development*, <https://www.cgdev.org/page/aid-pakistan-numbers>

¹² Raymond Lee, "The Strategic Importance of Chinese-Pakistani Relations," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 2016, https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/reports/documents/9b022a8c6ca84fda83be016f0376d27f_100.pdf.

amid the United States, China and Russia, the Sino-Russian nexus, the Sino-US global trade war along with other major developments in the region would surge Pakistan's relevance. Therefore, Islamabad needs to be extremely careful in handling the complexities of transition from the American hegemonic triumphalism¹³ to a world of multiple power centers.

Dynamics of the Future World Order

On the basis of comprehensive analyses of different variables of power, the economic indicators, military statistics and political sway, this study endeavours to determine the top rank global players and their role in the future world system. The United States and China are projected as the great powers in the 21st century world order. Pakistan's engagement with these powers shall award it a greater relevance due to its lasting and varied engagement with the US, growing ties with Russia and enduring strategic partnership with the rising great power, China.

Global Economies

Historical assessment of global politics reveals that once a state attains economic supremacy, it ultimately undertakes for military dominance. Prior to its military ascendance and hegemonic enterprise, the United States continued as the largest global economy for decades.¹⁴ Christopher Layne argues that almost all the great powers repeat the same rising pattern; likewise in future world system, China would also be ultimately rejuvenated by its exceptional economic growth and huge share in global trade to establish its military dominance at the regional and global levels.¹⁵ Eventually, Beijing would also be striving for a significant shift in the global balance of power to a multipolar world order.

Figure 1: An Outline of the Great Power Rise Pattern



Source: Christopher Layne, "After the Fall: U.S. Grand Strategy After the Pax-Americana

¹³ David Calleo, "Hegemony and Decline: Reflections on Recent American Experience," *Sens public* (2005).

¹⁴ Joseph S Nye, "The Future of Power," *Public Affairs*, (2011).

¹⁵ Christopher Layne, "This Time it's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 203-213.

Gross Domestic Products

GDP is the measure of inclusive monetary or market assessment of the overall finished goods, products and services of certain state. It is the vital indicator of the all-inclusive scorecard of economic health of the country. The World Bank highlights the following countries as the world's largest economies by 2018

Table 1: Top Ten GDPs in 2018¹⁶

Ranking	Country	US\$ Billions	Ranking	Country	US\$ Billions
1	USA	20,494.10	6	France	2,777.50
2	China	13,608.20	7	India	2,726.30
3	Japan	4,970.90	8	Italy	2,073.90
4	Germany	3,996.80	9	Brazil	1,868.60
5	UK	2,825.20	10	Canada	1,709.30

Source: World Development Indicators Database 2018, 'World Bank'.

The combined GDP of the European Union is US Dollar 18,749 Billion.¹⁷ Once pooled together, the EU accounts for the world's second largest economic power center. Hence, overall statistics reveal that the US, EU, China and Japan are the Group of Four (G-4) economic power centers of the world.

Table 2: Comparison of Top Nominal GDPs (2019-23)¹⁸

Country	Current Ranking	2019 (US\$B)	% Share in Global GDP	Projected 2023 (US\$B)	Projected Ranking
USA	1	21,482	24.4	24,671	1
China	2	14,172	16.1	19,581	2
Japan	3	5,221	5.93	5,908	3
Germany	4	4,117	4.67	4,937	4
India	5	2,958	3.36	4,330	5
France	6	2,8450	3.23	3,364	6
UK	7	2,810	3.19	3,257	7
Italy	8	2,113	2.4	2,396	8

Source: World Development Indicators Database 2018, 'World Bank'

The global GDPs ranking may change substantially in future. Maintaining their current growth, the emerging economies of Asia may exceed the world's top players. The International Monetary

Funds (IMF) maintains that from 2019 to 2023; the US, EU, China and Japan world's top four (G-4) GDPs¹⁹. However, in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) the G-3 economies would be China, US and India

¹⁶ "World Development Indicators Database 2018," *World Bank*, 2018, <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "World Economic Outlook Database," *International Monetary Fund*, Washington DC (October, 2018), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2018/02/weodata/index.aspx>.

respectively.²⁰

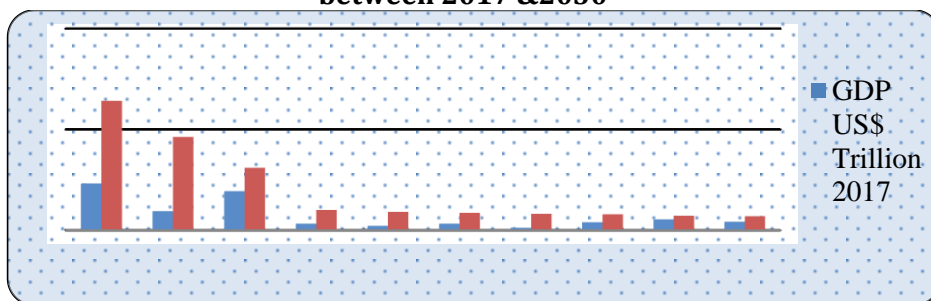
Table 3: Comparison of Top 10 GDPs PPP (2019-23)²¹

Country	Current Ranking	2019 (US\$B)	Percent Share in Global GDP	Projected GDP in 2023 (US\$B)	Projected Ranking
China	1	27,449	19.2	37,198	1
USA	2	21,482	15	24,671	2
India	3	11,413	7.98	16,575	3
Japan	4	5,807	4.06	6,380	4
Germany	5	4,555	3.18	5,184	5
Russia	6	4,345	3.04	4,966	7
Indonesia	7	3,753	2.62	4,969	6
Brazil	8	3,524	2.46	4,149	8
UK	9	3,145	2.2	3,609	9
France	10	3,081	2.15	3,541	10

Source: "World Economic Outlook Database," International Monetary Fund, (October, 2018)

The indicators of Gross Domestic Products certainly verify that in terms of both gauges, the nominal and PPP, majority of global economic players will remain the same in future decades. Obviously, the United States and China would maintain their position as being the two economic superpowers or G-2 economies in the 21st century world system. These two economic giants would be predominantly succeeded by the emerging economies, predominantly those from Asia.

Table 4: Comparison of the Largest GDPs (PPP) between 2017 & 2030²²



Source: Desjardins Jeff, World's Largest Economies in 2030, *Visual capitalist* (2019)

Global Trades

The volume of global trade is a vital indicator of overall economic status of a country. Countries having major share in global trade enjoy

²⁰ Ibid.

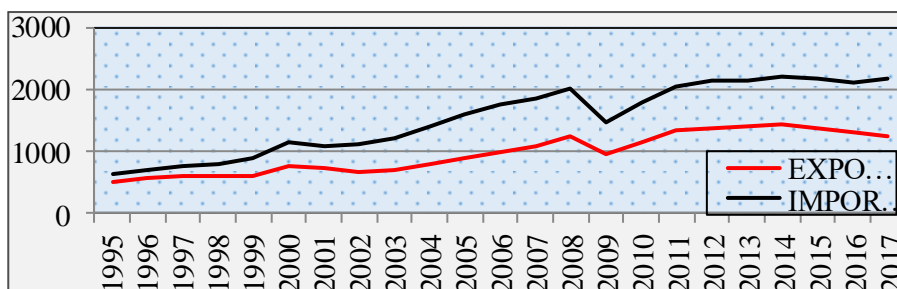
²¹ Ibid.

²² Jeff Desjardins, "World's Largest Economies in 2030," *Visual Capitalist*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/worlds-largest-10-economies-2030/>

stronger influence in the international politics. In the globalized world, geo-economics has overturned geopolitics. Interstate ties mainly aim at enhancing transnational trade; and complex political issues among competing nations are overlooked for attracting trades. Besides numerous conflicts, China maintains massive trade with the US, India and Japan.

The United States has since long been holding the title of the largest global economy and a prominent trade player, by earning around 20 percent of the world's overall income.²³ A famous American financial group, *The Balance*, indicates that in 2019 the United States' trade valued around US\$ 5.6 Trillion; out of that US\$ 2.5 Trillion are exports and US\$ 3.1 Trillion imports.²⁴ According to the *Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*, United States accounts for the 3rd largest exports and the 2nd largest imports in the world.²⁵

Table 5: American Exports and Imports (1995-2017) US\$ Billion²⁶



Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity, USA (2017)

China's growth rate and international trade displayed were exceptional rise in past three decades. The key indicator of its economic boom is the progressively rising volume of exports, making China the world's largest export economy. The OEC report 2017 indicated that Beijing maintained around US\$ 4 trillion exports and US\$ 1.54 trillion imports, the world's 2nd largest importer.

²³ Kimberly Amadeo, "Their Risks Derivatives, and their Rewards," *The Balance*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.thebalance.com/swap-line-definition-purpose-examples-3305966>.

²⁴ Kimberly Amadeo, "US Trade Deficit by Country, With Current Statistics and Issues: Why America Cannot Just Make Everything It Needs," *The Balance*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.thebalance.com/u-s-imports-and-exports-components-and-statistics-3306270>.

²⁵ OEC, United States, *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2017, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/usa/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

Table 6: Chinese Exports and Imports 1995 – 2017 (US\$ Billion)²⁷

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity, China (2018).

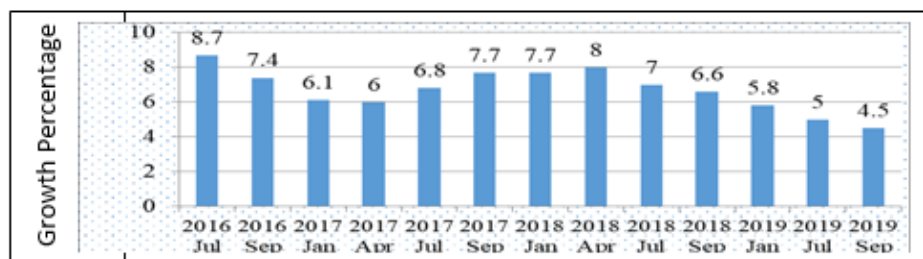
European Union is a major player in the overall world trade; however certain variations can be noted in its global trade data. The *'World's Top Exports'* indicates that in 2018, the combined EU's exports were Dollar 6.445 Trillion, accounting for around 37 percent share of the international trade.²⁸

There is certain second tier of global economies in various regions of the world, particularly from Asia are consistently striving for their key roles in the international economic order and the overall global system. These players may not surpass the G-3 economies, yet they may have certain role in coming decades. India's growth remained highly promising in last few decades. It was estimated that by 2030, it may overturn Japan and the US. However, according to the official figures of Indian Ministry of Statistics and Program implementation, the country's economy is facing severe challenges; with sharp decline in growth from 2016 and lowest since 2013.²⁹

²⁷ OEC, China, *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2018, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/china/>, last accessed December 19, 2020.

²⁸ Daniel Workman, *World's Top Exports*, 2018, <http://www.worldstopexports.com/category/countries/european-exporters>, last accessed December 19, 2020.

²⁹ Government of India, "Trading Economics; Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation," <http://www.mospi.gov.in/slider/graph-1>, last accessed December 19, 2020.

Table 7: Indian GDP Growth (2016 - 2019)³⁰

Source: Government of India: Trading Economics, Ministry of Statistics and Program implementation

Overall Assessment of the Global Economies

Comprehensive analysis of global economies specifies that China, USA and EU are the G-3 economic powers. Though American hegemony is declining; yet it will continue as a great power. China is aggressively challenging the American status-quo by exporting trillions of dollars as investment throughout the world to maximize its overall global power and influence. The Sino-EU economic interdependence, particularly through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can play vital role in shifting the pivot of global system from the “West” to the “East” or the “Rest”.³¹ Hence, the likelihood of transition in the contemporary international system to a multipolar or multicentric world order in 21st century is quite understandable.

Global Military Powers

Military might is the most significant aspect of national power; out of all its forms, none is more crucial than military clout of a country. Since, countries with strong militaries certainly enjoy greater security and stability; while weaker states are always at the mercy of their powerful neighbors and rivals. Military advantage helps in neutralizing the hostility of aggressors and reducing the contenders in international power politics.

Expansion of military power, as stated by the realist school of thought, has been the essence of rising to the great power status. Several weaker nations confronted ruination; since military power was the most dominant parameter of national power. In the modern liberal international system, the traditional phenomenon of power balancing related to just mounting the military arsenal has predominantly been overtaken by new trends, as provoked by the Neorealists that states maximize and utilize power to counterweight their rivals.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Post-American World," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/books/chapters/books.html>

Military consolidation marks states as global powers. However, certain great powers eventually faced destabilization for their excessive militarization; for disproportionately allocated resources to forces undermined the other components of national power; like the USSR. On the contrary, failure in military investments has failed the great powers in confronting their rivals; like, France nosedived in counterbalancing the German power and lost its control over Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.³² Comprehensive details of the global militaries are mentioned below.

United States

The '*Global Fire Power*', reports that out of 138 countries, USA is the world's strongest military power³³. Apart from the primary objective of defending USA from internal or external threats; its armed forces are meant to protect the Americans, their worldwide interests and their allies. The US forces ensure the freedom of international waters and airspace; simultaneously undertaking numerous contingencies in various parts of the world.

United States is the largest defense spender with US\$ 750 Billion, 300 percent higher than China's (2nd rank) and 700 percent higher than Russia's defense budgets.³⁴ Having unique geography between the Atlantic and Pacific; with 9,826,675 km² area; 12,000 km borders and 20,000 km coastline; the US maintains one of the world's largest militaries with 2.26 million personnel.³⁵ The US army maintains 6,417 attack helicopters (1st rank), 400 percent more than Russia; 8,725 tanks and around 10,000 nuclear weapons.³⁶

The United States also maintains the world's largest airpower with around; 13,400 aircrafts (quarter of the world) and 13,500 airports.³⁷ The US has 800 military bases around the world, several times more than the collective bases of its competitors.³⁸ The American Navy is among the

³² Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France 1870-1871*, Routledge, 2013.

³³ "Military Strength Ranking," *Global Fire Power*, 2020, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=united-states-of-america, last accessed December 19, 2020.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, Metropolitan, 2015; David Vine, "List of US Military Bases Abroad," 2017, American University, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17606/M6H599>; John Glaser, "Withdrawing from Overseas Bases: Why a Forward-Deployed Military Posture Is Unnecessary, Outdated, and Dangerous," Policy Analysis 816, CATO Institute, July 18, 2017; Frank Jacobs, "The World's Five Military

world's largest fleets with 415 ships; 68 submarines, 24 aircraft carriers and overall 33 major ports.³⁹

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that United States is the largest arms exporter in the world with around 36 percent share in global arms exports.⁴⁰ By 2018, the American firms received orders of around 900 fighter aircrafts, more than half of the world's jet sales.⁴¹

Russia

Traditionally, the Russian military has remained one of the most overriding powers throughout the world, predominantly since last two centuries. Geographically, Russia is the world's largest country, having 17,098,242 km² area; 22,408 km borders and a coastline of 37,653 km.⁴² Moscow maintains one of the most powerful forces; around 3.6 million personnel; and the leading stocks of nuclear weapons in the world.⁴³

According to SIPRI; the Russian military spending in 2018 were US\$B 61.4 (world's 6th highest).⁴⁴ However, Michael Kofman argues that Russian defense spending is actually US\$B 150-180 (world's 3rd largest) several times higher than the declared amount and enough to undermine the collective defense expenditures of major EU states.⁴⁵

Russia has the world's highest number (21,932) of tanks, 300 percent higher than the US; and around 50,000 armored fighting vehicles. It has one of the world's strongest air forces; 4,078 military aircrafts and 1,218 airports.⁴⁶ Russian Navy maintains one of the world's largest fleets;

Empires," *Big Think*, July 10, 2017, <http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/the-worlds-five-military-empires>; Damien Sharkov, "Russia's Military Compared to the U.S." *Newsweek*, June 8, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/russias-military-compared-us-which-country-has-more-military-bases-across-954328>

³⁹ Military Strength Ranking, "Global Fire Power, 2019," <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>

⁴⁰ "World Military Expenditure Grows to \$1.8 Trillion in 2018," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018>

⁴¹ Frederic S. Pearson, "The Global Spread of Arms: Political Economy of International Security," Routledge, 2018.

⁴² Military Strength Ranking, *Global Fire Power*, 2019.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wezeman, Fleurant, Kuimova, Tian and Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2018," *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, March, 2019, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/fs_1903_at_2018.pdf.

⁴⁵ Michal Kofman, "Russian Defense Spending is Much Larger and more Sustainable than it seems," *Defense News*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/05/03/russian-defense-spending-is-much-larger-and-more-sustainable-than-it-seems/>

⁴⁶ Military Strength Ranking, *Global Fire Power*, 2019.

around 600 ships, 62 submarines and only one aircraft carrier.⁴⁷ Being the 2nd largest arms exporter, Russia shipped military products of Dollar 14.5 Billion (around 21 percent of global arms trade) in the year 2015.⁴⁸ In terms of military statistics, in majority of other comparisons, Russia maintains either second or third place at the international level.

The current president Vladimir Putin aims to reinstate Russia as a global power, which is indispensable to restructure the American-led unipolar system.⁴⁹ The Russian military power is on the rise and unlike the Cold War, it is emphasizing at the notion of smaller but better forces, maintaining more mobility and highly balanced approach, which is speedily becoming more proficient in handling the wide ranging modern warfare tactics. The Russian military forces are not only capable of intervening in countries of its periphery, but they are also skilled to operate far away in the Middle East.⁵⁰

The Russian operation for annexing Crimea in 2014; its political mobilization as well as combat move in Eastern Ukraine; and finally the will and pace of the Russian troops in Syrian operation; startled the entire world. These engagements are highly significant illustrations of Moscow's future designs and its ambitions for leading role in the 21st century multipolar world order.⁵¹

China

The demography of China is exceptional; having the world's largest population and standing army with 1,385 and 2.7 million respectively. China covers 9.6 mil km² area, 22,457 km borders, 14,500 km coastline, about 500 airports.⁵² Since the beginning of 21st century, China has focused upon the expansion and modernization of Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) with 10 percent annual hike in its defense budget.⁵³ However, correct numbers of its military spending have mostly been questioned; as in 2018 its official defense budget was US\$B 170, but certain estimations expressed it around Dollar 239 Billion.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Richard Connolly and Sendstad Cecilie, "*Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia*," Chatham House, 2017.

⁴⁹ Vladimir Frolov, "Putin Seeks Entente Cordiale with the West," Opinion: *The Moscow Times*, November 24, 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Military Strength Ranking, *Global Fire Power*, 2019

⁵³ Russia Power Military, "Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations," *Defense Intelligence* (2017).

⁵⁴ China Power Team, "What does China Really Spend on its Military?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 28 (2015), <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>

China's armed forces are equipped with 13,000 tanks and 3,187 military aircrafts, 2nd and 3rd largest in the world.⁵⁵ China has been maintaining one of the biggest and recklessly growing navies around the world. A former US Navy officer admits that once absolutely dominant in the Far-East region, currently the American ships sails very guardedly in the yellow waters.⁵⁶ The PLA naval fleet has been belligerently modernized to defend China's interests in the region and also to encounter the serious challenges of the 21st century politics.

The rapid rise of China is also driving the PLA to follow the strategy of modernization and indigenization. The Chinese military industry is fulfilling its own defense requirements and it is also exporting range of military equipment to other developing nations like, Pakistan to earn revenue and also expand its political influence.

Analyses of Global Military Powers

Throughout the 20th century, the United States remained the world's most decisive military power. Any actor, intending to rupture the American interests or disrupt the overall world order had to bear the ferocity of the US military. Nonetheless, at the dawn of the 21st century, the American hegemony is no more simply inalienable. The additional engagements incurred by the self-imposed American commitments ultimately overburdened its economy and military. Simultaneously, the US has to confront; the emerging military powers, China and Russia; and their growing military influence in various regions. These military giants are massively pressurizing the US to spend more on its military for maintaining its hegemony.

In the contemporary system, a great deal of disparity can be found in the military powers of the leading global actors. Majority of variables ascertain that the US military power is unparalleled; its defense spending is higher than that of the combined military budgets of eight succeeding armed forces.⁵⁷ Conversely, China has speedily arisen as a new potential rival to the American military muscles, predominantly in Asia-Pacific as well as the Indian Ocean. Beijing has increased its defense spending by manifold, since the dawn of the 21st century. Russia also holds one of the world's strongest and modern armed forces, capable of proving its power in the region and away.

⁵⁵ Military Strength Ranking, *Global Fire Power*, 2019.

⁵⁶ David Lague, and Benjamin Kang Lim, "The Chinese Challenge, Ruling the Waves:China's Vast Fleet is Tipping the Balance in the Pacific," *Reuters*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-navy/>

⁵⁷ Wezeman, Fleurant, Kuimova, Tian and Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers," 2018.

Even in the contemporary globalized world military power is still inevitable. Majority of the World powers have been consistently increasing their military spending. In 2018, the global defense outlay grew 2.6 percent as compared to the preceding year, with total volume of US\$B 1822 and 76 percent increase in global defense budget between 1988 and 2018.⁵⁸ The two largest global economies are the highest military spenders too. Nonetheless, United States, China and Russia are the world's strongest military powers.

Since the dawn of 21st century, Beijing and Moscow have strengthened their strategic alignment. These Eurasian powers have stark differences with the US on various issues in different regions of the world. China and Russia have constructed an underlying empathy on challenging the worldwide American hegemony. The United States seems offcolor; for the Trump regime is more focused on internal issues than the global commitments. From Brussels, the NATO's headquarters, signals for the US are least promising, after conflicts with Turkey over the Syrian crisis.⁵⁹ Germany and France, NATO's key players, also have differences with USA on various global issues.

Second Tier of Military Powers

Other than three military giants; France, UK and Germany are also among the most modern military powers. They can win further eminence, if pooled together as NATO members, though loosely connected. Quantitatively, these armed forces may lag behind the US, China and Russia; but qualitatively they are highly robust and equipped with most lethal weapons. The combined militaries of EU states will constitute a robust force and an indispensable great military power. However, Europeans have already constituted NATO, led by the US. Secondly, in case the Europeans withdraw from NATO for establishing their EU's military component like, the European Parliament, there would be a leadership issue; as EU has already faced Brexit; after UK's withdrawal.⁶⁰

Several other players also exert for their key roles in international power politics. Some of this second tier of military powers; India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia; statistically stand among the largest militaries; while few others like, Pakistan, have unavoidable geostrategic significance.

India, in some studies is projected as an emerging power. However, qualitative analysis of Indian military reveals obsolescence, particularly after its jets were shot down by Pakistan in February 2019.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Turkey-Syria Offensive: US Sanctions Turkish Ministries," *BBC*, October 15, 2019.

⁶⁰ "Brexit: The UK has Officially Left the EU: What Happens Next?" *BBC*, January 31, 2020.

The New York Times labeled the Indian military equipment as “vintage”.⁶¹ The NYT also highlighted that its forces are facing grave challenges; for losing fighter planes to a country whose military is too small in numbers and expenditures.⁶² Gaurav Gogoi, a lawmaker and a member of India’s Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defense, highlights that Indian troops lack modern equipment.⁶³

India is also facing regional and domestic challenges. Owing to a stark ethnic assortment in India, clashes between fundamentalist Hindus and the minorities are often reported. Reportedly, in some cases violence against minorities by Hindu extremists is supported by major political parties in the country, particularly the present administration of Narendra Modi and his political wing Bharatiya Janata Party are blamed.⁶⁴ The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, in 2019, reported the happenings of forced religious conversions, cases of hate crimes and provocation to violence against a number of religious minorities. The USCIRF report also maintains that the situation for these Indian minorities has dramatically deteriorated.⁶⁵

Freedom movements in Indian held Kashmir and in different parts of the country are also serious issues. The people of this region have been consistently demanding for their legitimate and repeatedly promise right of self-determination since the era of partition of Indian-Subcontinent.⁶⁶ The special status of Kashmir through Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution has been repealed by Modi’s regime since the August 2019; and since then the state of Kashmir has been kept under the military control.⁶⁷ The Sikhs community of India has also been dissatisfied with

⁶¹ Maria Abi-Habib, “After India Loses Dogfight to Pakistan, Questions Arise about its ‘Vintage’ Military,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/03/world/asia/india-military-united-states-china.html>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Paul Marshall, “Hinduism and Terror,” *Hudson Institute*, June 1, 2004, <https://www.hudson.org/research/4575-hinduism-and-terror>

⁶⁵ Tier 2 India “United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2019,” *USCIRF, Annual Report*, 2019, <https://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2019-annual-report>.

⁶⁶ Muhammad Mumtaz, “Right of Self Determination for Kashmiri People; an International Law Perspective,” *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law* 1 (2012).

⁶⁷ Mehari Taddele Maru, “A New Cold War in Africa: Increasing Tensions between China and the US will be Detrimental to African Prosperity and Peace,” *Aljazeera* (Opinion/China), July 1, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/cold-war-africa-190630102044847.html>

behaviour of radical Hindu elements and it has been traditionally demanding for an independent territory, "Khalistan."⁶⁸

Despite being a major player, India could not establish its leadership role in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); due to acceptability problem. India has several conflicts with majority of the countries in the region. There have been several territorial conflicts between China and India; the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India is one of the most debated issues of the world; while India also confronts numerous water and border issues with Bangladesh and Nepal.⁶⁹ So the Indian designs of being a great power are overshadowed by various challenges it is facing at the domestic and regional levels.

Global Political Powers

Global political powers or the great powers are the most influential international players. Countries with huge economies and overriding militaries also exercise political dominance. Another highly significant instrument of international power politics is the possession of Veto Power or permanent seat in United Nations Security Council. Hence, the US, China, Russia and EU (by virtue of Veto power of France and UK) are the major political centers worldwide.⁷⁰

Among the veto powers, the US indisputably clenches a distinct position. Since, so far it has been the only global power that is capable and committed to play its dominant role to ensure the overall world order. Other three players certainly play their role in streamlining the world system; but for their own interests; and none of them could so far override the American influence in global power politics.⁷¹ However, China is striving to expand its influence in various regions of the world by employing global trade and massive offshore investments as the instruments of political power, predominantly after launching its 1990s "Go Out" strategy.⁷²

⁶⁸ Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "The Khalistan Movement of 1984: A Critical Appreciation," *South Asian Studies (1026-678X)* 32, No. 1 (2017).

⁶⁹ Afshana Parven & MS Hasan, "Trans-boundary Water Conflicts between Bangladesh and India: Water Governance Practice for Conflict Resolution," *International Journal of Agricultural Research, Innovation and Technology* 8, no. 1 (2018): 79-84.

⁷⁰ Frans-Paul van der Putten, Jan Rood & Minke Meijnders, "Great Powers and Global Stability," *Clingendael Monitor*, 2016 https://www.Clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/clingendael_monitor_2016-great_powers_and_global_stability-eng_0.pdf (2016).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Mehari Taddele Maru, "A New Cold War in Africa: Increasing Tensions between China and the US will be Detrimental to African Prosperity and Peace," *Aljazeera* (Opinion/China), July 1, 2019.

The 21st Century World Order and the American Hegemonic Declinism

Relations between the axes of global powers always have an impact on world order; it will certainly influence the future world order. The US-EU Transatlantic engagement remained the pivot of global politics in unipolar system; nonetheless, the core of 21st century world order would be the nature of Sino-US engagement.⁷³ On the contrary, the Sino-Russian axis would be another critical aspect of the multipolar world; as the strategic partnership aims at advancing their worldwide influence and challenging the US hegemony at various forums. They have a resolve to effectively contest the American unilateralism and institute a balanced multilateral world order. Obviously, the most curious angle of this system would be the simultaneous presence of cooperation and conflict; and economic interdependence will be the core of Sino-US relations. The degree of cooperation and conflict amid great powers shall primarily govern the future world order.

From the American hegemonic triumphalism to declinism is taken to be as the core of the 21st century world order. This hegemonic decline would mainly revolve around three hypotheses; the “crying wolf” symptoms, the “bionic man” syndrome and the analogy to classical “Roman Empire”⁷⁴ Perhaps the “crying wolf” is the most critical notion, disturbing those who negate declinism. However, others strongly believe that indeed the “wolf” (China) has definitely arrived with its flamboyant entry on the global political theater. The “bionic man” syndrome is also based on opposing arguments between; those optimistic about the future American role and those eyeing at the rising great powers to redraw the outline of the 21st century world order.⁷⁵

A renowned anti-declinst, Joseph S. Nye maintains that the US decline would be analogous to that of the “Roman Empire.”⁷⁶ He argues that just like the classical Roman Empire, the US decline would not occur radically, but it would be slow and steady. The profound counter argument is that Rome had no great power in opposition. Unlike the Roman; but very much like the British empire that did not take much longer to decline in early 20th century; the US as the leading but weakening hegemon is facing serious challengers; especially China and Russia; and therefore its decline may not take too long. However, despite its hegemonic decline, the United States would still survive as a key international player of the global system.

⁷³ Frans-Paul van der Putten, Jan Rood & Minke Meijnders, 2016.

⁷⁴ Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

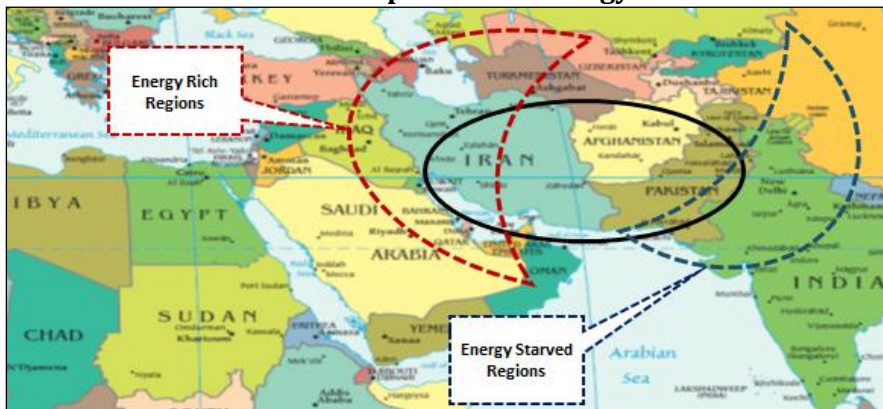
⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Declinist Pundits," *Foreign Policy* 196 (2012): 64.

The Under-Transition World Order: Implications for Pakistan

Interstate relations have ever been a complex issue. Historically, weaker nations had always been at the mercy of imperial powers. However, with the passage of time, despite their rivalry or competition states have gradually learnt cooperate each other for mutual gains or international peace. Hence, the perception of national interests of all states, stronger or weaker, has become a dominant perception in the modern globalized system. Therefore, smaller but geographically significant states like Pakistan have also earned an inexorable position in international politics.

**Figure 2: South-West Asian Heartland-Linking
the World's Population & Energy Hubs**



Source: <https://www.infoplease.com/atlas/asia>

Pakistan is blessed with a vital geostrategic location in the South-West Asian heartland. There lives a huge mass of around 2,800 million people (mainly China & India) in its North-East.⁷⁷ The North/South-West of Pakistan is the energy rich Central Asian and the Gulf regions; and any foreseeable transit between the world's population and energy hubs shall pass through Pakistani territory.

Owing to highly significant geostrategic location, since its existence in 1947, Pakistan has customarily been a part of the foreign policy goals of the great powers. It is a well-known fact that Henry Kissinger's renowned visit to Beijing in early 1970s could materialized only through the diplomatic involvement of Islamabad. As a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, eventually Pakistan also felt threatened by the so called expansionist designs of Moscow.⁷⁸ However, the United States and its

⁷⁷ "Current World Population," World of Meters, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

⁷⁸ Geoffrey Warner, "Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China, 1969-1972," *International Affairs* 83, no. 4 (2007): 763-781.

Western allies supported the guerrilla fighters in the first Afghan war, making Pakistan effectively a basecamp of weapons and warriors for jihadists against the Soviet forces.⁷⁹ Again the post 9/11 'War on Terror' marked Pakistan as the front line state and non-NATO ally of the US. Therefore, Islamabad's engagement with global powers and its role in the international power politics has mostly been unavoidable.

Pakistan-US Complex Engagement

Islamabad and Washington have the decades-long history of inescapable but perplexed relations, where the two actors always holding a demand-lists in their mutual interactions. The earlier has been the on-and-off necessity of the later at the time of various critical circumstances in the region. On the contrary, Washington has been the economic and defense assistance destination of Islamabad.⁸⁰ In their current engagement, the United States expects that Pakistan shall play a key role in convincing Taliban for talks; while Islamabad hopes that Washington must support it in resolving the long outstanding issue of Kashmir. The Sino-US growing tension may also demand in future that Pakistan must play its bridging role between the contenders, like it did in the past.⁸¹

Pakistan-China Strategic Ties

The two neighbors have friendly ties and strategic partnership; ready to support each other at the global forums and also in internal challenges. Beijing has always helped Islamabad in building; energy, infrastructure and strategic installations; while the later has also supported the earlier in its odd times, particularly in the early decades of China's isolation. Pakistan is the chief exports destination of Chinese defense products. The CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), worth billions of dollars investment and thousands of jobs, is the trademark of strategic and economic ties between the two nations. China aims to develop its western regions through CPEC, the shortest possible access to the Indian Ocean for its global trade.

In the South-West of Pakistan, Gwadar Port lies at the outskirts of the Strait of Hormuz; the world's biggest oil chokepoint and one of the busiest trade routes in the world; which may turn-out to be the focus of international politics, as if the tensions ever flare-up in the Middle East.⁸²

⁷⁹ Richard Sakwa, *"The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union,"* Routledge, 2005.

⁸⁰ Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," *IPRI Journal* 13, no. 2 (2013): 63-86.

⁸¹ Ziad Haider, "Could Pakistan Bridge the US-China Divide?" *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/25/could-pakistan-bridge-the-u-s-china-divide/>

⁸² "Strait of Hormuz, the World's Biggest Oil Chokepoint, in Focus as U.S.-Iran Tensions Flare," *MarketWatch*, January 6, 2020,

The Port is a vital project of the Pak-China geostrategic partnership; and it may also attract wider significance in the regional and international perspectives of the future world system, particularly after the rising criticism against the CPEC from the US and India.⁸³

Pakistan-Russia Growing Ties

The two countries are the members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but have a history of unpromising relations. However, currently they are heading towards a new era of cooperation. Islamabad can benefit from Moscow in its defense and energy needs; while in Russia's drive of fortifying regional and global influence, the later would like to see more constructive and result oriented engagement with earlier.⁸⁴ Pakistan looks for the Russian investment in CPEC and its other energy and infrastructure projects; while its counterpart may like wider detachment between Islamabad and Washington.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

These two countries have historical and cultural relations. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the perpetual unrest forced millions of refugees across the Durand Line that badly affected the socio-economic fabric of Pakistan. In last four decades, the Afghan peace process has mostly been considered incomplete without taking Islamabad into confidence. Therefore, for the future roadmap of Afghanistan, all the stakeholder, particularly the great powers look towards Pakistan for its significant role. The authorities in Washington and Kabul also believe that negotiation with Taliban may not be result-oriented without Pakistan's active involvement.

Pakistan-India as Traditional Rivals

Pakistan and India have traditional rivalry of historical, ideological, territorial, political and economic rifts. Kashmir, cross-border infiltration and water management are the key issues between them. India, a key player in South Asia, also has contentions with China; while the two Indian neighbors have strong strategic ties for decades. Any significant development in the region may have fallout on Pakistan. The current escalations in Kashmir valley and the clashes on the *Line of Actual Control* (LAC) on the Indo-Chinese border can have spillover effects on the region,

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/strait-of-hormuz-the-worlds-biggest-oil-chokepoint-in-focus-as-us-iran-tensions-flare-2020-01-03>

⁸³ Shreya Talwar, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its Geopolitical Implications," Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), 2015.

⁸⁴ Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," *IPRI Journal* 13, no. 2 (2013): 63-86.

especially Pakistan. Adopting the strategy of “Kin country syndrome” New Delhi would blame Pakistan for any incident, like it did in the case of Pulwama attack.⁸⁵ Tensions amid China-India-Pakistan can spike any time that may eventually destabilize the whole region and even the entire world order.

Therefore, Pakistan needs to revisit its customary and predictable response towards its traditional rival, India. Islamabad ought to have a logical and calculated retort to the Indian hysterical approach, especially across the line of control (LOC). It must also capitalize every opportunity to persuade India for dialogues at every regional and global forum to resolve all outstanding issues in a peaceful manner.

Pakistan and the Persian Gulf

Pakistan has closer relations with majority of the Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia. Islamabad and Riyadh have supported each other in several critical times. On the contrary, Iran and Pakistan are neighbors, having satisfying ties. In the recent past, while tension grew between Tehran and Riyadh, the two regional competitors in the Gulf, Islamabad tried to defuse the situation by suggesting negotiations. In case of any future escalation between the two actors; once again Islamabad may be expected to play its considerable role in neutralizing the situation, as conflict in the region would directly and indirectly affect the internal and external dynamics of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan is the only country around the world that is having regional or global powers at its borders. Its traditional rival, India lies in the East; the rising superpower, China in the North, Russia in the North-West periphery; the American military bases in Afghanistan; and a Persian Gulf's regional power, Iran; are neighboring Pakistan. The strategic worth of the country is further intensified as it coastlines the Indian Ocean, one of the main theaters of the 21st century global politics. Such a highly critical geography renders a vital significance to the country. Since, any crucial development, positively initiated or negatively triggered, in the region will certainly have deeper impacts on Pakistan. Hence, multifaceted engagements of Islamabad with majority of the regional and global players would certainly establish its vital role in the 21st century world system.

In the 21st century world order; Pakistan, though not a great power; may still remain on the center stage of international power politics, particularly due to crucial developments in its region. The contemporary world system is an era of transition or the age of new developments and

⁸⁵ Moeed Yusuf, "The Pulwama Crisis: Flirting With War in a Nuclear Environment," *Arms Control Today* 49, no. 4 (2019): 6-11.

new alignments. Various global power centers are aiming at new engagements in different regions of the world. Pakistan is geographically placed in a highly critical region; where China is rapidly rising and maximizing its regional and worldwide influence. The existing superpower, USA, has often expressed its intentions of China's containment, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Any belligerence between the declining and the emerging superpowers would directly affect the internal and external dynamics of Pakistan.

Therefore, Islamabad has to be extremely careful in its foreign policy choices, since it may not afford conflicting relations; either with the US or China and Russia. Pakistan needs to play its cards very intelligently and it has to maintain a balance in its relations with all the great powers; particularly with the two most significant among them, the US and China.