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**A disordered world**

The rapidly intensifying rivalry between China and the US has unleashed forces which have badly destabilized the world order established by the West in the wake of World War II.

China’s phenomenal economic growth over the past four decades, followed by the steady rise of its military power has posed a serious challenge to American global supremacy. According to credible projections, China’s GDP in nominal dollar terms will overtake that of the US within this decade after having surpassed it in purchasing power parity terms in 2014.

China is also fast catching up with the US in science and technology, especially in such fields as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, semiconductors, bio-technology, and space research. If China continues to increase its military expenditure at a much faster pace than the US as is the case currently, it would also emerge as the most powerful military power in the world within the next three decades.

It is advantageous to be powerful in the game of nations. Powerful nations set the international agenda and lay down the rules of the game, which are skewed in their favour – thus making sure that major decisions on critically important issues are such that meet their approval. It is not surprising, therefore, that the world order established primarily by the US-led West after World War II aimed at ensuring the pre-eminence of the Western countries in security, economic and financial spheres. Powerful nations can also get away with the violation of the rules of inter-state conduct when it suits them. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was such a violation of the UN Charter and its obligations under the principles of international law. There are numerous other examples of similar violations by the US and other Western states in the post-World War II history.

The foregoing analysis explains the continuous refrain of the US-led West that China should abide by the so-called rules-based order which was designed in the first place to perpetuate the Western hegemony. For the same reason, it is inevitable that as China grows in economic power and military muscle, it will challenge those rules and features of the present world order which are meant primarily to serve the Western interests. Other emerging powers like Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and Nigeria are also likely to demand accommodation of their interests through modification of the rules of the prevailing world order in such fields as international trade. However, the biggest challenge to the prevailing world order is posed by China’s dramatic rise, together with the re-assertion of Russia’s power in its neighbourhood and the Middle East.

As Napoleon remarked about two centuries ago, “Let China sleep; when she wakes up, she will shake the world.” China’s century of humiliation ended with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. It is on course now to claim its rightful place in the comity of nations. Ideally, the West should accommodate China’s legitimate interests peacefully through appropriate adjustments in the current world security and economic architecture. Instead, the overt and covert resistance by the US and other Western countries to the expansion of China’s power and influence in international affairs is destabilizing the prevailing world order, aggravating global tensions, and sowing the seeds of low intensity conflicts, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

Already there are reports of occasional encounters between US and Chinese forces in the South China Sea where China’s territorial claims are contested by the US, other Western countries and the regional states. The dispute over Taiwan, which is recognized by most of the world and even by the US as part of China, also has the potential to explode into a major crisis if the Taiwanese government, which enjoys Washington’s support, makes a move towards independence. The dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea is another source of tensions. The US policy of containment of China through building alliances with Japan, South Korea and Australia, developing a strategic partnership with India, destabilizing China internally, and activating the Quad, which is a quasi-alliance among US, Japan, India and Australia to counter China, will inevitably heighten global tensions.

The US is also deeply concerned over the expansion of China’s economic power and influence through trade and investment in different regions in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), of which CPEC is an important component, is a huge Chinese project to develop China’s economic and commercial connectivity with Eurasian countries and Africa. It is hardly surprising that the US views BRI through the strategic lens as an instrument to expand China’s economic and commercial influence abroad at its expense. It is therefore employing all overt and covert means to undermine it.

Pakistan obviously cannot remain immune from the implications of the increasingly disorderly world in which national economic and military power rather than international law and morality will play the decisive role. It, therefore, must stabilize itself politically while developing its economic and military power and promoting advancement in science and technology to face the daunting challenges posed by the growing world disorder. It is a pity that right now the country is deeply destabilized politically and vulnerable economically. The situation is fraught with serious dangers for the country’s security and economic well-being.

While our efforts to develop friendly relations with the US on the basis of mutual respect must continue, Washington’s strategic partnership with New Delhi leaves us with no choice but to deepen our strategic cooperation with China and expedite the implementation of CPEC projects. We should also take vigorous steps to defeat India’s moves to isolate us at regional and global levels, especially in handling Afghanistan and the issue of terrorism.

Above all, we must realize that economic dependence on foreign donors and an independent foreign policy in Pakistan’s best interests cannot go together. As a nation we must learn to live within our means by practising policies of austerity and self-reliance. The country still awaits a leader who goes beyond mere declarations to actually implement these policies to put Pakistan on the road to rapid economic progress and enable it to acquire a dignified position at the international level.

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