**Global transformation**

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THE world is undergoing a transformation of historic proportions. Two main drivers of this are the growing US-China rivalry and the scientific and technological revolution worldwide especially in the US, China, Western Europe and other developed countries. Both developments will have farreaching implications for global politics, security and economy. Countries, which understand the fundamental forces driving the world and take steps to safeguard their national interests, will forge ahead of others who fail to understand the implications of the changes shaping the globe.

The defining feature of the 21st century will be the growing US-China rivalry.

China`s dramatic rise over the past four decades has already catapulted it to a position of international pre-eminence economically.

China`s GDP surpassed that of the US in 2014 to assume the top position in purchasing power parity terms internationally. In terms of GDP at the prevailing exchange rates, China is likely to overtake America before the end of the current decade. Even in the military field, China is fast catching up. China`s defence budget, which lags far behind the US defence budget, is expected to exceed the latter by 2035. China is also making rapid progress in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects to provide a solid base for its longterm economic, scientific and technological progress. The tipping point is likely to come by 2050, if not earlier, by which time China will emerge as the single most powerful nation in the world both in the economic and military fields if present trends continue.

These far-reaching developments are redrawing the geopolitical map at regional andgloballevels.As Chinarises,itwillinevitably demand the accommodation of its interests in the global political, security and economic architecture. In the past, most of the time when a rising power challenged the supremacy of an existing hegemon, it led to conflicts and wars because of the perceived clash of interests. The main question is whether the US will lean towards the accommodation of China`s legitimate interests or choose the path of confrontation.

Washington under the Trump administration had chosen the confrontationist course through such steps as building up US alliances with countries in China`s neighbourhood, notably Japan, South Korea, India and Australia; imposing punitive tariffs on imports from China; challenging China`s growing presence in the South China Sea, and, undermining China`s Belt and Road Initiative of which CPEC is an important part. Under the incoming Biden administration, the US is likely to be less conf rontationist and may even welcome cooperation insuch areas as climate change and health, while trying to outcompete China in the economic and security fields bilaterally and globally. Thus, competition between the US and China will continue to grow, pushing the latter closer to Russia and generating tensions and even local conflicts, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

This prospect raises critical foreign policy and security issues for the consideration of Pakistan`s leaders and policymakers. The main foreign policy challenge confronting Pakistan would be to deepen its strategic cooperation with China in the face of the growing US-India strategic partnership while maintaining friendly ties with the US-led West which has its own importance in Pakistan`s political, economic and security calculations. The ramifications of the global geopolitical transformation in the Middle East, in the backdrop of the growing Indo-US-Israeli political, security and economic footprint in the region and the deep political divide between Iran and some ofthe GCC states, will pose their own set of difficult foreign policy choices for Pakistan.

The scientific and technological revolution unfolding in the US, China, Western Europe and other developed countries is another elementdriving the global transformation over and above the growing US-China rivalry.

Developments in cutting-edge information technology ie semi-conductors, data, 5G mobile networks, internet standards, artificial intelligence and quantum computing particularly will help determine not on1 y which country or countries have military edge but also a more dynamic economy.

Countries neglecting education, particularly science and technology, in their national development plans will increasingly become irrelevant in international politics with the passage of time.

Unfortunately, Pakistan, which lags far behind in economic, scientific and technological development because of the shortsightedness of its leaders and policymakers, falls in this category. In the absence of necessary corrective steps by our government, the adverse consequences of our flawed policies will continue to haunt us far into the future.  The writer is a retired ambassador and author.

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