**Growing challenge**

BY J A V I D H U S A I N 2023-05-02

A NEW Cold War is on with the US and China as the protagonists. The seeds were sown by the US determination to maintain its global hegemony in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the challenge posed to the US domination by China`s dramatic rise. In 1992, the US through a leaked Pentagon planning document stressed that its overarching strategic goal, `is to prevent the reemergence of a new rival ... that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. ... Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.` However, China`s meteoric rise in due course upset America`s long-term strategicplanning.

Following the policies of economic reforms and opening to the outside world introduced by Deng Xiaoping, China`s economy took off. From 1978 to 2011, China maintained an average annual growth rate of nearly 10 per cent, thus, doubling its GDP after every seven years.

By 2014, China`s GDP in purchasing power parity terms had surpassed that of the US.

China`s rapid economic growth has also provided it with the resources to build up its military power at a fast pace.

China`s fast-developing economic and trade links worldwide have enabled it to increase its economic and political clout in Asia, the Persian Gulf region, Africa and Latin America. The conciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered by China is the latest example of its growing diplomatic footprint in the Persian Gulf region. Beijing`s Belt and Road Initiative, which was launched in 2013, aims at enhancing China`s economic and commercial links with Eurasian and African countries, including Pakistan, through trade and investment.

America, in the face of the challenge posed by a rapidly rising China, has employed all levers of hard and soft power at its disposal to slow down China`s progress and check the expansion of its power and influence, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. In a major departure from its slogans of free trade and economic competition, Washington has imposed far-reaching economic, commercial and technological sanctions to slow down China`s economic growth and technological development. It has beefed up its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region and encircled China through a string of alliances or strategic partnerships with such countries as South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, India and Australia in pursuance of its policy of containment of China. It has revived or put in place new strategic arrangementssuch as Quad and AUKUS for the same purpose. Washington is also seen as pursuing policies to destabilise China internally, especially in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong.

China and the US are caught in Thucydides`s trap, popularised by Graham Allison through his book, Destinedfor War, in which an emerging power challenges the domination of an existing hegemon making the war between them almost inevitable because of the resultant structural stresses. America insists that China must fall in line with the rules-based order established by the US-led West after World War H to perpetuate its global domination.

China wants the prevailing world order to be modified to accommodate its legitimate interests. Going by America`s anti-China policies of the past few years, a prolonged period of confrontation rather than conciliation is more likely. This confrontation can manifest itself in tensions, political strife, and localised proxy conflicts onsuch issues as Taiwan and territorial disputes in the South China and East China Seas.

Predictably, China has tilted in favour of Russia on the Ukraine war issue.

Despite its painful implications, there may also be some decoupling of theeconomies of the two sides because of the hard American sanctions against China.

However, a full-fledged war between the nuclear-armed US and China can be safely ruled out because of its extensive destructive consequences.

The world because of the new Cold War is in search of a new equilibrium. It is gradually sliding towards a highly inhospitable environment marked by the domination of power politics over international law, diminished authority of the UN over strategic security issues, and shifting alliances. The ultimate guarantee of security in such a disorderly world would be the power of states and their allies. Pakistan, therefore, must build up its own national power with a special focus on political stability and economic and technological strength while developing strategic cooperation with China and other friendly countriesto enhanceits security and economic prosperity.  The wnter is a retired ambassador and author of Pakistan and a World in Disorder: A Grand Strategy for the Twenty-First Century.

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