[**US global retreat?**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1666942/us-global-retreat)

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THE [end](https://www.dawn.com/news/1643697) of the US military occupation of Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power has ignited an intense debate on the future goals and directions of US foreign policy. The main question is whether the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan portends the weakening of the US resolve, the diminution of its power and the curtailment of its worldwide commitments to maintain its global domination and uphold the world order established by it together with its allies in the aftermath of World War II.

It is worth recalling that the Soviet Union’s military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 ultimately led to its defeat in the Cold War and its disintegration. But the USSR was in a uniquely weak position when it encountered its military setback in Afghanistan. Economically it was in a state of decline, strategically it was overstretched, internationally it was isolated, and ideologically and politically it was a sick state, riven with dissensions. The Soviet military debacle in Afghanistan delivered the coup de grâce to a political edifice which was ripe for collapse.

The US is committed to a policy of containment of China.

The US position is not comparable to that of the Soviet Union after its military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Despite the strategic blunders which led to its [unceremonious retreat](https://www.dawn.com/news/1640806) from Afghanistan, the US economy remains the biggest in the world with the most advanced technologies and enormous worldwide influence both bilaterally and multilaterally through international political and financial institutions. Its economy together with that of the European Union, which is closely allied with the US, accounts for about 45 per cent of the world GDP.

Militarily also, the US is the most powerful nation in the world. Its advantage over its rivals increases if one takes into account the support of its allies. If one combines the US hard power with its soft power, it remains and is likely to remain ahead of any challenger for the next two to three decades at least. So it would be a huge mistake to underrate America’s power and worldwide influence or to predict a precipitate US retreat from its commitments abroad during this period.

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However, in China, which has registered dramatically high economic growth over the past four decades and is now rapidly building up its military power and developing advanced technologies, the US faces a formidable challenger in the economic, technological and military fields in the long run. If the present trends continue, the tipping point in favour of China may come sometime after 2050 when China would emerge as the most powerful country in the world economically and militarily. Undoubtedly, the growing US-China rivalry would be the defining feature of international politics in the 21st century. This is not to deny the strategic implications of an assertive Russia, which under Vladimir Putin is [resisting](https://www.dawn.com/news/1664440) the eastward expansion of Nato, especially into Ukraine, and the possibility of the emergence of other major powers.

The strategic challenge from China will come in the form of demands for the restructuring of the present US-dominated world order to accommodate China’s legitimate political, security, economic, financial and commercial interests. These demands will be resisted by the US. Consequently, the Indo-Pacific region is likely to witness growing tensions and even local conflicts because of such issues as Taiwan and China’s attempts to expand its power in its southern and eastern peripheries.

As reflected in President Joe Biden’s recent [conversation](https://www.dawn.com/news/1658518) with his Chinese counterpart, the US is firmly committed to the policy of containment of China. It is, therefore, streng­thening its alliances in the Indo-Pacific region in the form of Quad and Aukus. The growing US-India strategic partnership is part of the American grand design to contain China.

In the short to medium-term, the US because of the favourable balance of power may successfully resist the strategic challenge from China. However, if the present trends continue, the US in the long run will be forced to adjust its policies and curtail its commitments abroad to accommodate China’s legitimate interests.

**Read:** [*America's China preoccupation*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630604)

Pakistan has no choice but to seek closer strategic cooperation with China to correct the power imbalance that the US policies are creating in our region because of its growing strategic cooperation with India. CPEC against this background carries enormous strategic and economic benefits for Pakistan. However, Pakistan should also simultaneously do its best to maintain friendly relations and cooperation with the US in areas where their interests are convergent while being mindful of both the potential and limitations of such cooperation in the emerging strategic scenario.

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