

Competing Visions: Unveiling the Sino-US Rivalry in the Post-9/11 Global Order

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Abstract

The post 9/11 era witnessed a dynamic interplay of military, political, and trade relations between the China and US, encompassing both cooperation and divergence. Despite efforts to foster cooperation, regional differences, particularly in the South China Sea, persisted. China aimed to assert its authority in the region, while the US sought regional supremacy and protected its interests. The political relationship involved a delicate balance between strategic ties and political differences, presenting challenges due to contrasting beliefs and economic approaches. Trade relations experienced significant growth and deepened economic interdependence although trade imbalances, market access restrictions, an intellectual property concerns became contentious issues. The US implemented trade measures to address perceived unfair practices, resulting in trade disputes and negotiations. China's ambitions raised concerns regarding its intentions to reform or replace the existing international order, although it did not aim to replace the US outright. The rivalry between the two nations extended across various dimensions, including the economy, geo-strategic competition, finance, space, and regional crisis. This competition intensified during the Trump administration, which adopted

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an Indo-Pacific policy to counter China's influence. Alliance such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and AUKUS pact was formed to address security concerns and contain China's growing influence. In conclusion, the post 9/11 era and its subsequent phase witnessed a complex interplay of military, political, and trade relations between the China and US, with efforts to foster cooperation accompanied by differences and tensions that shaped the dynamics between the influential nations.

Keywords: *Sino-US cold war, Post 9/11 era, Cooperation, Divergence, Indo-Pacific Policy.*

Introduction

In the wake of the transformative post 9/11 era, a complex interplay of military, political, and trade perspective emerged, defining the intricate relationship between the China and US. As these two global powers navigated the challenges of 21st century, their interactions spanned a wide spectrum of issues, encompassing security, diplomacy, and economic cooperation. This research work delves into the multifaceted nature of Sino-US relations, providing a comprehensive exploration that illuminates how military strategies, political dynamics, and trade considerations have shaped their engagement. By intertwining these crucial perspectives, we gain valuable insights into the ever-evolving dynamics of this bilateral relationship as its profound implications on the global stage.

The period that unfolded from 2015 onwards stands as a pivotal juncture in the intricate tapestry of relations between the China and US. It represents a challenges phase, often regarded as the zenith of the Sino-US cold war, thereby endowing their bond with the distinction of being the world's most intricate bilateral relationship. The competition between these two influential nations reverberates across military, political, and trade dimensions,

exerting far reaching effects on the global landscape. China, aspiring to reform the existing international political arena, seeks to carve its path without outright supplanting the US.

Instead, it pursues a course that aims to displace its rival from its long-standing position of dominance. In contrast, the US, particularly under the administration of President Trump, embraced a policy of withdrawal diplomacy, altering its approach to global affairs. While China steers clear of military alliances, its ambition lies in securing a dominant position within the Indo-Pacific region. Fuelling this pursuit is China's endeavour to wield significant financial influence, thereby establishing its hegemony in an increasingly interconnected world.

Throughout this challenging phase, numerous dimensions of contention have emerged, serving as points of contention between China and the US. From economic factors and geo-strategic rivalries to financial diplomacy and territorial disputes, these elements have contributed to the escalating tensions and complexity of their relationship. Moreover, the Sino-US trade war, with its inception rooted in the imposition of tariffs and retaliatory measures, has served as a catalyst, further straining their already fragile ties.

To counter China's expanding influence, the US has orchestrated a strategic response, formulating its Indo-Pacific policy. This multifaceted approach aims to fortify the security of its allies, including nations such as South Korea, Australia, Japan, and India, effectively curtailing China's ability to pose threats and diminishing its overall sway in the region. Through initiatives like Free and Reciprocal Trading Policies, Open and Free Seas, Défense Cooperation, and Alternative Economic Packages, the US endeavours

to counterbalance China's economic endeavours, such as the ambitious Belt and Road initiative.

Recognizing the need to bolster its position in the Indo-Pacific, the US has fostered alliances and partnerships, underscoring its commitment to maintaining regional stability. The QUAD, comprising the US, India, Australia, and Japan, stands as a significant forum for addressing regional concerns and promoting maritime security, connectivity, and economic expansion. Furthermore, the establishment of the AUKUS security pact between the US, the UK, and Australia further exemplifies the proactive steps taken to augment Australia's defence capabilities through the provision of advanced nuclear-powered submarines.

In essence, this period of heightened competition and strained relations between the China and US encapsulates the intricate tapestry of their bilateral bond. By scrutinizing the interplay of military strategies, political dynamics, and trade considerations, we gain a profound understanding of the intricate dance these two global powers engage in. This comprehensive examination sheds light on the evolving dynamics of their relationship, shaping not only their own destinies but also the trajectory of the global order in the 21st century.

Military relations of China and US in the post 9/11 era

Despite the mounting security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region, the US and China have progressed in Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) to secure and sustain cooperation at the bilateral level in the wake of strategic challenges. Consequently, differences persist in the foreign policy approaches of the US and China regarding the South China Sea. However, China demands that the US recognize Chinese sovereignty over the South China Sea and assist in achieving the status of a major power.

According to John Mearsheimer, as a hegemonic power, the US has several key objectives for extending its influence in the international political arena. Firstly, it seeks regional supremacy by exerting control over its neighbouring zones. Secondly, the US aims to prevent other emerging powers from expanding their influence and hegemony within its own zone. Additionally, the US strives for freedom and liberty to navigate internationally. Furthermore, the US intends to avoid the dominance and ascendancy achieved by other rising powers in different regions as well (Mearsheimer, 2001).

However, in 2014, it was also witnessed that, despite growing and expanding Sino-US military relations, a complete check and balance was maintained on the Chinese military and its development programs under the umbrella of the Quadrennial Défense Review Program (QDR). The following year saw a 9.5% average rise since 2005 in the budget of the Chinese military, reaching \$160 billion, a 12.2% increase from the previous year's \$132 billion (XINHUANET, 2022). According to the annual report by the US, the anticipated figures claimed by the US were actually higher compared to the \$148 billion released by Chinese Défense ministry officials (Nadkarni, 2010).

There was an increase in the manufacturing of ballistic, conventional, and cruise missiles in the Chinese defense sector. In 2015, joint military operations to counter piracy and enhance security were also conducted between the US and China. The US Army chief has also facilitated Chinese military presence in RIMPAC. The Strategic Security Dialogue between US and Chinese military officials has emerged as a significant initiative to promote mutual understanding, military-to-military negotiations, and a secure bilateral security mechanism (Obama, 2022). Chinese coastlines are under the control of the PLA Navy. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is equipped

with modernized electronic submarines and updated information units as they strive to reach the level of the US (Institute, 2022).

Additionally, the Chinese Air Force possesses electronic radar operation and warfare capabilities, along with the latest electronic and missile units in their fighter aircraft to counter airborne threats. According to the US, China also possesses space combat technologies. China successfully launched an anti-satellite missile in 2007 and has capabilities for second-strike capability. China's nuclear capabilities have been enhanced with increased mobility and reliability (R.S. Norris, 2022).

Consequently, until the Chinese administrators encouraged cooperation, stability, and peace, the US had a stable relationship with them. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the US in October 2015. President Obama viewed China's advancements as a peaceful contribution to the policy in the Asia-Pacific region. Clashes between the US and China over the South China Sea declined as S&SD negotiations played a role in diffusing tension (Obama B., 2022). However, from a broader perspective, both the US and China desire the benefits of free land and air passages under the framework of international law.

According to the US Defense office, President Obama further stated that China needs to align its behaviour with its new position in the international political arena. China's approach toward its neighbours revolves around "winning without fighting," which facilitates its access to the Indian Ocean, African region, Middle Eastern region, and the East and South China Sea. However, China's advancements have raised concerns for the US administration, as it has diminished US influence in the international political arena. These tactics by China could sway the interests and support of the US allies in favour of China (Defense, 2022).

Furthermore, President Xi Jinping claimed that China has maintained an atmosphere of peace, stability, and collaboration in its Sino-US relationship and in the international political arena, while keeping militarization at bay (Shirk, 2008). From a broader perspective, merging and diverging factors in US-China military relations were observed. Neo-realism has defined China's conduct in UN peacekeeping missions, nuclear non-proliferation, counterterrorism, environmental protection, energy protection, trade markets, and piracy. The neo-realist approach has also influenced the cooperative relationship between the US and China in handling issues such as the Korean peninsula to prevent disruption and conflicts. Divergence in Sino-US military interests was observed in the Taiwanese issue and during the expansion of US-Taiwan ties.

Political relations of the China and US in the post 9/11 era

It can be said that the foreign policy goals of the US and China after the 9/11 incident have been driven by national security considerations. They sought political maturity and stability based on solid beliefs to address strategic disparities over regional and global issues. The post-9/11 political relations between the US and China were characterized by a unique blend of complexities and difficulties. Neo-realism and complex interdependence shaped the nature and conduct of the Sino-US political bond. According to Henry Kissinger, a fundamental difference between the political beliefs of the US and China lies in their contrasting ideologies (Kissinger, 2011). The US administration viewed the Chinese free market as contradictory to their Washington consensus, represented by the Beijing consensus (Sujian Guo, 2010).

Specifically, since 1972, bilateral relations between the US and China have strengthened, leading to deeper diplomatic ties. The nature of the Sino-

US bond can be measured through cultural exchange programs, joint educational and scientific ventures, and bilateral trade (America, 2022). President Jiang Zemin and his successor President Hu Jintao each visited the US twice during their tenures. Subsequently, nine US Presidents visited China starting from 1972, and President Obama visited China three times. Over sixty negotiating channels were established between the US and China from the 1980s onwards. Both countries managed their complexities and differences in a constructive manner (China, 2015).

From President Nixon's visit to President Obama's visit to China, a combination of engagements to balance strategic ties was observed (Friedberg, 2012). Furthermore, the US assisted China on various international platforms, including their membership in the WTO in 1999. This act by the US administration laid the foundation for a constructive relationship between the US and China (Clifford, 2002). The US's approach to balance is more about creating a challenging environment for Chinese forces in the South China Sea conflict. State-level meetings and negotiations between the US and China aimed to encourage collaboration, sustainability, and cooperation while addressing disputes, miscalculations, or misunderstandings at the bilateral level (Pentagon, 2001, 2006, 2014).

Moreover, during the post-Clinton era, the US administration under President G. Bush declared China as a strategic competitor. President Bush adopted a cautious approach towards China due to its ambiguous stance on the expanding Chinese military presence around Taiwan (Congress, 2006-2008). Following the 9/11 incident in New York City, the parameters of US foreign policy towards China shifted from viewing them as strategic competitors to strategic collaborators, primarily to combat terrorism. The US President acknowledged China's entry into the international political arena as a reliable

stakeholder. However, this statement by President Bush also reflected that the US was willing to accommodate China at the international forum only if their rise did not disturb the balance of power in the international political arena. China, on the other hand, saw the title of "reliable stakeholder" as its duty towards the United States of America (Zoellick, 2005).

The Sino-US bond gained smooth momentum during the administration of President Obama and desired deeper CBMs and strategic reassurance. However, the US also demanded transparent military practices from China to encourage peaceful interactions in the international political arena. In the 2013 published white paper, China introduced the concept of comprehensive security, which revolves around a scientific perspective on development (Banerjee, 2013). In simple terms, the Chinese vision aimed to shape a peaceful bond in the international political arena while balancing internal and external peace. Cooperation between the US and China was observed in strengthening the global economic cycle, bilateral educational programs, efficient supply chains, cyber politics, clean energy, transparency regulations, climate-friendly measures, human rights, and combating wildlife trafficking (Jisi, 2011).

After the Sunny lands summit in 2013, a wave of cordial Sino-US relations was observed. US President Obama regarded the closer ties between the US and China as a peaceful indication for the international political and security arena. It has also been observed that the traditional approach between existing and rising powers has changed to provide more chances of cooperation, collaboration, and peace internationally. The US's acknowledgment of China's stable and mature conduct in the international political arena was appreciated by Chinese officials (China, 2015).

It can be said that the US and China collaborated to find resolutions for mutual and global security challenges. Moreover, they both acknowledged that they indirectly protect and encourage their mutual interests. They decided to collaborate swiftly to facilitate progress towards a BTI (Building Theories of International Relations) framework. To implement the post-2015 development framework, the US and China played a justifiable role in mutual collaboration. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed by the US and China to resolve security concerns, encourage peace and support African and Asian regions. The US and China worked together to promote peace and support Afghanistan's peacekeeping missions, execute United Nations resolutions, and address aspects of the Iranian nuclear deal (Imam et al., 2023).

The US and China also decided to enhance public-level bilateral relations to track and strengthen their ties. Various programs were initiated by the administrations of the US and China to enhance people-to-people interaction, including profitable cultural exchange programs. Both countries opened the doors to tourism, with accommodations and affirming 2016 as a tourism year. Efforts were made in the educational front, with around fifty thousand educational scholarships granted to students from the US and China. Some exceptional educational exchange programs between the US and China were extended to 2020. Additionally, under the umbrella of the Strategic & Economic Dialogue (S&ED), the US and China collaborated on environmental sectors, energy, and climate change programs. A ten-year framework program was initiated by the joint administrations for the environmental and energy sectors. Mutual assurance for the Green Climate Fund program was provided by the US and China, particularly to reduce carbon emissions in weaker states (Saleem, 2022).

However, a degree of tussle between the Sino-US bonds is unavoidable, but extensive ambassadorial-level negotiations and other channels help address such challenges. Moreover, concerns were raised by the US administration regarding the deteriorating human rights situation in China. Issues such as internet and media censorship, imprisonment of journalists, political workers, activists, and rampant violence and terrorism in Xinjiang and Tibet triggered US concerns and criticism of the Chinese administration in these regions. The US demanded China to introduce and implement reforms, reduce rigidities, and encourage freedom of religion as a peaceful gesture to reduce uncertainty. However, the Chinese claim over the territory of Xinjiang and Tibet was acknowledged by US President Barack Obama during his press conference with the Chinese counterpart in 2015 (Obama B., 2022). Strong criticism was expressed by the US along with calls for implemented.

Trade and Economic Relations of Sino-US in the Post 9-11 Phase

Mutual needs and fears have laid the foundation for the complex economic and trade relations between Sino-US. It can be said that the political and strategic relationship of the US and China has influenced their economic and trade affairs as well. Decent policies were formulated by the officials of both states, mainly to address their differences in trade and economics. The commitments of the US and China regarding financial matters were constructed within a bilaterally designed framework. Their negotiations under the umbrella of S&ED intended to promote dialogue at the next level.

However, it has been observed that China has become the fastest-growing export destination for the US. A 90% increase in US exports to China was seen primarily between 2007 and 2013. The interdependence of trade and economic sectors between China and the US has led to an increase in purchasing power parity in both countries. In the US, the influx of direct

investment from China has more than doubled. The US has invested approximately \$50 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Chinese territory. The complexity involved in the bond between the US and China has been fuelled by the complications of their trade and economic concerns. The financial vulnerabilities of the US and China were worth around \$3 trillion.

Furthermore, US officials opted for a coercive strategy towards China regarding the use of the US dollar as a reserve currency. This has led to a decline in Chinese foreign exchange reserves and exports. The US accused China of intending to harm US workers and companies through discriminatory strategies by Chinese companies. To promote sustainability in global financial and economic matters, the US and China put forward a comprehensive strategy for coordination in macroeconomics.

China implemented sweeping economic reforms to handle trade affairs and international market exchange rates. Although the Chinese administration showed fewer acts on the executed reforms, China managed to sustain an economic expansion of 7.5% during the initial period of 2014. Additionally, currency manipulation has been a crucial issue in Sino-US trade and economic relations. It was observed that China was reluctant to keep the exchange rate floating in the international economic market and preferred to fix it. The inclusion of China in the WTO was criticized by the US and European states due to their currency manipulation and unethical economic practices. The main motive behind China's currency manipulation was to provide illegal subsidies to their exporters, indirectly contributing to the US trade deficit. This trade deficit has hindered the US economic sector from achieving desired profits (Obama, 2022).

US officials expressed satisfaction with China's commitments to avoid currency devaluation and implement market reforms. President Obama assured

the Chinese President that the US had no interest in engaging in cyber-economic spying.

Series of Hostility in Contemporary Era (2015-22)

The phase from 2015 onwards can be regarded as one of the struggling phases in the relationship between the US and China. The changes of the contemporary era have unexpectedly altered the preferences of states' survival in the international political arena. Nuclear-powered states can go to extreme lengths to avoid nuclear war. During this phase, the US and China faced several challenges and encounters in various dimensions, aspects, and sectors of their relationship. This struggling phase can also be considered the peak of the Sino-US cold war. Their relationship from this phase is declared as the world's most highly complex bilateral bond. 'The Diplomat' even stated that the cold war between China and the US has been initiated. The Sino-US rivalry has been a hot topic for articles in TRT World, BBC, Foreign Affairs, CNN, and The New York Times

Overview of Competition

As described by scholar Allah Yar, 'competition' is the best buzzword to describe the Sino-US bond from the phase of 2015 onwards. The competitive nature of their relationship has allowed them to occupy a central position in the international political arena. These states are a great source of trade and global lending. Additionally, it can be observed whether China desires to bring reforms to the existing international political arena or wants to establish a new setup. Yar concluded that China is not attempting to replace the US, but rather to displace it. He further added that the US has opted for a policy of withdrawal diplomacy during this phase, particularly under President Trump's administration. China does not desire to engage in alliances, be it military, troop deployments, or spreading systems, but is more inclined

towards achieving dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. China is more willing to provide financial infrastructure to accomplish hegemony (Yar, 2022).

Furthermore, the Chinese President stated that an undivided or revived China would be on the same level as or surpass the US. This vision was already put forward in the book 'China Dream' by Colonel Liu Mingfu from the NDU of China, making the Sino-US rivalry unavoidable regardless of how committed China is to peaceful growth (Mingfu, 2015).

When this competition genuinely initiated?

According to Mr. Allah Yar, the genuine competition between the US and China began under the administration of Donald J. Trump. The published US National Security Strategy Report in December 2017 clearly stated that 'the USA has entered the era of major power competition' (USA, 2017).

Contours of the Sino-US Relationship

In a conducted interview, Scholar Agha Shahryar Khan described the listed dimensions as the bone of contention in the Sino-US relationship. The enlisted dimensions are as follows:

1. **Economy:** The major factor of clash between the US and China is the expanding economy of China. A firm economy can have a stronger impact, encompassing strict regulations on trade, technology, and cyber warfare.
2. **Geo-strategic competition:** This competition primarily takes place in the Indo-Pacific region and involves concepts such as an Asian-style NATO, TTIP, AUKUS, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
3. **Financial Chinese Diplomacy:** This includes initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

4. Space Competition.
5. South China Sea.
6. Hong Kong Crisis 2020.
7. China exploiting WTO.
8. Direct challenge to the US-led world order.
9. US and Taiwan closer ties.
10. Accusations on China by the US.
11. China's increasing hegemony in territories where the US has less control (Khan, 2022).

On the eve of the 14th annual Shangri-La Dialogue for Asian Security in 2015, the US Defense Secretary, Mr. Ashton Carter, warned China to stop militarization in its claimed disputed territory of the South China Sea, based on received evidence.

In 2017, Donald J. Trump became the President of the US and assured the Chinese administration that the US would proceed under the umbrella of the 'one China' policy. After this declaration on February 9, 2017, official ties were established with China, while unofficial ties were built with Taiwan. In March, US Secretary of State, Mr. Rex Tillerson, visited China and stated that 'the US and China will always seek win-win situations, mutual cooperation, and respect.' In April, the US President met his Chinese counterpart during the Mar-a-Lago estate summit in Florida. After negotiations on trade and North Korean affairs, tremendous progress in the Sino-US bond was acknowledged by President Trump, and President Xi appreciated it as a bond of great trust and deep understanding. Ten-part agreements were signed between the US and China, mainly to enhance trade items such as poultry, electronic payments, and beef. The US Commerce Secretary stated that the Sino-US bond is reaching new heights.

In March 2018, a set of sweeping tariffs worth \$50 billion were imposed on imports from China by the US in response to the alleged theft of US intellectual property and technology by China. These tariffs included commercial goods, Chinese investments on US soil, and items such as aluminium and steel. China retaliated by imposing increased tariffs on US imports as well. In early July, President Trump imposed fresh tariffs on Chinese medical, transportation, industrial, and television items worth \$34 billion. This action was again met with retaliation from President Xi Jinping, who enforced new tariffs on 500 US items, including seafood, soybeans, dairy, and beef. This phase marked the height of the Sino-US trade war.

In early October, US Vice President Mike P. illustrated the changing policy of the US towards China. He stated that the US is going to prioritize competition over cooperation to counter China's escalating economic aggression by imposing tariffs. He further criticized China for militarizing the South China Sea, theft of US technology and intellectual rights, and even Chinese involvement in US elections. China's foreign office criticized these accusations as groundless claims and advised the US not to damage Sino-US ties. In December, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Chinese company Huawei, Mr. Meng Wenzhou, was apprehended by the Canadian government at the request of President Trump's administration. Huawei and its CFO were accused of disrespecting trade agreements against Iran. This arrest of a Chinese national was met with retaliation as Chinese official's detained two Canadian nationals, accusing them of sabotaging Chinese national security. In September 2021, Mr. Meng reached an agreement with US prosecuting attorneys and was permitted to return to China. The arrested Canadian nationals were also released by the Chinese administration.

In early March 2019, the Huawei issue intensified, and the US restricted allies and US companies from using Huawei equipment, as it might be used for spying. In mid-May, the Sino-US trade war escalated further as fresh tariffs worth \$200 billion were imposed by Trump on Chinese imports. In response, new charges were imposed on US imports worth \$60 billion. In August, President Trump labelled China as a 'Currency Manipulator.' China regarded this act of the US as potentially escalating turmoil in the global financial market. In late November, a democratic act regarding Hong Kong's human rights was signed by President Trump. China imposed sanctions on US-owned companies in Chinese territory and suspended the US warship.

In mid-January 2020, the US took back the imposed title of 'Currency Manipulator' on China. An agreement was signed between Vice-Premier of China Liu H. and President Trump, leading to the relaxation of tariffs from both sides. In late January, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a blame game started between the US and China regarding the outbreak of the deadly pandemic. Until mid-March, both states restricted the number of journalists in each other's countries. On July 14, President Trump approved an executive order ending Hong Kong's privileged status with the US. In response, China called for the US to execute sanctions.

Additionally, the US closed Chinese consulates in Texas and Houston over theft accusations.

In retaliation, the Chinese administration closed the US embassy in Chengdu. On July 23, in a briefing, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo clearly stated that the phase of cooperative and collaborative engagements with China is over due to unjust acts and practices by the Chinese administration related to trade, the South China Sea, intellectual theft, the pandemic, and economic aggression. The US further encouraged other states to exert pressure on China

to change its approach and conduct. During the last days of President Trump's term, the US maintained a tough stance with China. Various Chinese technological companies were put on trade blacklists, more sanctions were imposed on Chinese officials, and the US tightened visa policies for Chinese nationals and their investments in Chinese-owned companies or organizations. Beijing announced its response to all these actions.

On January 21, 2021 (the last day of President Trump in office), M. Pompeo blatantly announced that an act of genocide is being conducted on the Muslim ethnic group Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province of China. President Joe Biden, his successor, adopted Trump's approach and restricted all types of imports from Xinjiang. In mid-March, President Biden stressed in his statement the need to invest in technology, infrastructure, and domestic industries to counter Chinese hegemony. He also extended bans, tariffs, and restrictions on China. In mid-June, NATO shifted its focus to China, primarily to address its nuclear and military modernization. It is said that the US encouraged other states to collectively respond to China within NATO. In November, US and Chinese officials met on the sidelines of the UN conference on climate change in Glasgow and expressed the intention to enhance cooperation in introducing regulatory frameworks, promoting renewable energy, and addressing carbon emissions. Both Presidents also had a virtual meeting in mid-November, but no firm joint statement was issued. Chinese President Xi stated that the US assisting Taiwan is similar to playing with fire, while President Biden criticized China for its genocide against Muslims in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, President Biden claimed that guardrails were established to prevent disputes.

On the eve of the Winter Olympics in February 2022, the US diplomatically boycotted the Chinese Winter Olympics due to the genocide

and other unjust practices. Several countries, including the UK, Australia, and Canada, also refused to send their athletes to the event. China issued a statement accusing the US of politicizing sports. In mid-March, President Biden had a virtual meeting with his Chinese counterpart and sternly warned against backing and assisting Russia militarily, financially, morally, or militarily in the escalating war in Ukraine. In late May, President Biden announced a three-pronged strategy, prioritizing countering Chinese aggression by engaging with US allies and regional partners, investing in domestic technology, industries, and infrastructure, and countering China in the international political arena. China's foreign affairs responded by claiming themselves as a global guardian. In August, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan and met with the President to show support. China retaliated by imposing sanctions on the House Speaker, cutting off climate change negotiations, and ending various high-profile communication channels. The People's Liberation Army conducted live-fire drills around the Taiwanese island, launched ballistic missiles towards the island, and Chinese aircraft violated the line between Taiwan and mainland China. These aggressive actions by China were heavily criticized by G7 states. In response, China blamed the US for the escalated tensions (Relations, 2022).

US's Indo-Pacific Policy

In the conducted interview, Scholar Agha Shehryar Khan defined the Indo-Pacific policy as a policy driven by the US to counter China's influence in the Asian region. Chinese hegemony is expanding with each passing day, not only in the Asian sphere but also beyond Asia, in terms of technology, economy, political influence, diplomatic relationships, and medicine. The Indo-Pacific policy encompasses several strategies to overcome Chinese influence, including:

A) Free and Reciprocal Trading Policies B) Open and Free Sea C) Defense Cooperation D) Alternative Economic packages

The significance of this region for the US can be illustrated by the published report by the UN, which states that \$1.9 trillion worth of US trade passes through this region.

Under these dimensions, the US aims to provide additional security measures to its ally states like South Korea, Australia, Japan, and India. This approach aims to prevent China from threatening these states, ultimately reducing its influence and military capabilities. Furthermore, the US has initiated projects such as B3W (Build Back Better World) and the Blue Dot network specifically for neighbouring states in the Indo-Pacific region. These strategies are designed to counter Chinese economic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Khan, 2022).

QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)

The QUAD is a group alliance comprising four member states: the US, India, Australia, and Japan. It was primarily founded in 2004 with the agenda of combating Iranian invasions, terrorism, and the Arab Spring. In 2017, its agenda was revised to focus on containing China. In 2020, it transformed into QUAD PLUS when three more neighbouring states of China, namely New Zealand, Vietnam, and South Korea, joined the alliance. With this addition, the US aimed to signal that China's comfort zone among its neighbours is under the influence of the US. Through this alliance, the US sought to portray the narrative as not being China versus the US, but rather China versus regional members (US allies). The US has propagated the misconception that China influences the regional states and that the liberal US is there to rescue these influenced states, as it believes 'you cannot change your neighbours, but you can change your friends.'

The QUAD is essentially a diplomatic forum provided to discuss the challenging concerns and affairs of member states. Its key agenda includes delivering maritime security, enhancing connectivity within member states, addressing cyber issues, and promoting economic expansion. However, this diplomatic alliance of QUAD has faced criticism for being exclusive, nurturing China's strategic obsession, and for its perceived lack of tangible outcomes (Khan, 2022).

AUKUS

A security pact took place on September 15, 2021, involving three states: the UK, US, and Australia. This historic security pact allows Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, as well as the sharing of the latest technologies for combating rising cyber issues, artificial intelligence, and long-range weapons. Moreover, this pact came as a surprise to the world. Instead of a de-escalation of nuclear capabilities, the US is moving towards encouraging nuclear technologies. Australian officials clarified that having nuclear submarines does not mean Australia will develop nuclear weapons (Khan, 2022).

Scholar Allah Yar Khan elucidated the AUKUS pact in the following words: it is one of the most significant security agreements after World War II. It will focus on military capabilities while keeping it separate from the shared intelligence agency 'The Five Eyes,' which includes New Zealand and Canada. AUKUS also aims to address shared undersea technologies (Yar, 2022).

Ramifications of the QUAD and AUKUS

The business of balancing Chinese hegemony has now entered a serious phase.

- It is a time when states need to choose between the US and China.

- The QUAD will destabilize the current regional order revolving around the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- AUKUS will trigger a new arms race in the region.
- India, Japan, and Vietnam are emerging as prime supporters of the Western world in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The US, Australia, India, and Japan are on the verge of joining forces to build a rare-earth procurement chain to counter China's dominance in supplying these crucial elements to manufacturers of everything from smartphones to high-profile motors to EV batteries.

China's response to the AUKUS & QUAD

Chinese officials argue that the formation of AUKUS will trigger a nuclear arms race in the region. They further view its formation not as a competition, but as an effort to contain China and weaken its economic rise. Additionally, they claim that President Biden is following the patterns set by President Trump and intensifying tensions. China has engaged in disputes with the United Kingdom (UK) over the issue of Hong Kong and with Canada regarding the detention of citizens. Europe has referred to China as a 'systemic rival'. China's deputy foreign minister for Asian affairs, Luo Zhaohui, stated, 'China does not create trouble, but China is not afraid of trouble'. In another address, he accused the US of frequently causing disturbances and attempting to make it difficult for states to choose a side between the US and China. He also explained that the current circumstances in the South China Sea protect US interests instead of the neighbouring countries in the region. He alleged that the US is the sole troublemaker in the region, disrupting the balance of power, peace, and cooperation.

International Response to the AUKUS & QUAD

The governments of Indonesia and Malaysia expressed deep concerns about the disruption caused by the arms race in the region. Singapore maintained a neutral stance. Japan and India warmly welcomed the deals as a means to confront China. China's ally, North Korea, criticized these US-led pacts, labelling them as 'dangerous and undesirable'. North Korea even hinted at the development of its own atomic arsenals in response to the supply of nuclear-powered technology to Australia in the form of nuclear submarines.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the post-9/11 era witnessed a complex interplay of military, political, and trade dynamics in Sino-US relations. Both countries made efforts to foster cooperation, but their relationship was characterized by a mix of cooperation and divergence. In the military domain, joint training exercises and dialogues aimed to build confidence, yet regional differences, particularly regarding the South China Sea, persisted. China sought recognition and pursued its ambitions to establish itself as a major global power, while the United States safeguarded its interests and sought regional supremacy.

On the political front, the relationship between the two nations involved a delicate balance between strategic ties and political differences. Cultural exchanges and bilateral trade played significant roles in strengthening their ties, but challenges arose due to contrasting political beliefs and economic approaches. Trade relations between China and the US experienced remarkable growth, leading to deepened economic interdependence. However, trade imbalances, market access restrictions, and concerns over intellectual property became contentious issues. Despite efforts to enhance trade cooperation, strains and trade disputes emerged, ultimately culminating in a trade war that impacted both economies.

From 2015 onwards, the Sino-US relationship entered a struggling phase, often characterized as the peak of a Sino-US cold war. This phase witnessed heightened competition across various dimensions, including the economy, geo-strategic competition, financial diplomacy, and regional crises. The rivalry intensified during the Trump administration, which pursued an Indo-Pacific policy aimed at countering China's influence. In response, alliances such as the QUAD and the AUKUS pact were formed to address security concerns and contain China's growing influence.

Consequently, it can be concluded that the relationship between China and the United States during this period was marked by rivalry, competition, and a series of disputes and challenges across various areas. The dynamics between these two influential nations shaped the global stage and had significant implications for military, political, and trade relations on an international scale.

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