

# SINO-RUSSIAN ROLE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WORLD ORDER

Hassan Farooq\* & Muhammad Khan\*\*

## Abstract

*China and Russia have developed an underlying empathy on the transition of the contemporary US-led hegemonic world order. Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the two Eurasian powers have been striving for transforming the global system to a multipolar world system. As Beijing and Moscow, along with other emerging powers were already weary of Washington's unipolar moment and its self-proclaimed authority of overriding the entire international system. In the American worldwide hegemony, the rest of the nations; neither alone nor collectively could challenge its supremacy; as the political, economic and military dominance of the US was ascertained by its ascendancy in the post-World war II established international organizations. However, during the past few decades the rapid rise of China; the resurgence of Russia and the relative decline of the US; evidently specify that the era of Pax-American is on the go. Moreover, the launching of Beijing sponsored transnational initiatives can be acknowledged as the pillars of a new multicentric global system in future. Hence, the dynamics of international politics are apparently heading towards the transition of the contemporary world system to a multipolar structure; where besides the US, China and Russia would also play significant role.*

**Keywords:** Unilateralist, multipolar, declinism, triumphalism, hegemony.

## Introduction

Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US-led hegemonic world system has been consistently challenged by the rising powers, particularly those from the East. The US-EU transatlantic axis, essentially the driving force of the hegemonic world order, has started to lose its overall capacity of governing the entire global system. Owing to the emergence of multiple

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\* Ph.D. in IR, Department of International Relations & Political Science, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [hassanfarooq014@gmail.com](mailto:hassanfarooq014@gmail.com)

\*\* Professor, Department of International Relations & Political Science, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [drmkndu1964@gmail.com](mailto:drmkndu1964@gmail.com)

power centers in the contemporary world system, the likelihood of a single most dominant epicenter of global politics seems dubious. The newly emerging powerful players, especially China and Russia are patently striving for a new multipolar world order. Scholars of international politics maintain that China is stretching muscles for introducing its own brand of globalisation through institutionalization<sup>1</sup> by launching massive transnational initiatives like; the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most critical aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order would be the simultaneous presence of conflict and cooperation amid the future superpowers, the US and China. The two global powers, despite being the largest trading partners, have already launched a global trade war that was further intensified by the eruption of coronavirus, in early 2020. Hence, rivalry and interdependence, as propounded by the realists and liberalists, may run side by side in the upcoming international system. The great powers particularly; the US, China and Russia needs to be exceedingly watchful to any intensification in conflict of interests that may result an all-out belligerence and worldwide destabilization of the entire global system.

The international political theater heralds the culmination of Pax-Americana; which gives rise to the question that what would be the major fault-lines of this transition. Certainly, the key elements of this dramatic shift would predominantly be the internal and external drivers of the American hegemonic decline, as narrated by Christopher Layne.<sup>3</sup> As for the domestic drivers of American decline; debt, deficits, and the depreciating Dollar are the horrendous challenges to the US hegemony. On the external fronts the emerging powers; particularly the rise of China at the global stage and the resurgence of Russian influence in Eastern Europe and the Middle East; along with growing strategic alignment between the two Eurasian powers; are the tests of American global hegemony. The debates that “unipolarity is ending, has ended, or will soon end”, and the global system is reverting to multipolar, bipolar, apolar or any other coinage; has become an essential gist of international politics<sup>4</sup>. Hence, the voices broadcasting that the US-led hegemonic world order is taking its last breaths are certainly materializing with every passing day.<sup>5</sup> This paper aims to analyse the interplay amid the

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<sup>1</sup> Bora Ly, “China and Global Governance: Leadership through BRI,” *Cogent Social Sciences*, 6(1), (2020), 1801371.

<sup>2</sup> Serafettin Yilmaz & Bo Li, “The BRI-Led Globalization and its Implications for East Asian Regionalization,” *Chinese Political Science Review*, (2020): 1-22.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Layne, “This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax-Americana,” *International studies quarterly*, 56(1), (2012): 203-213.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, “The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global position,” *International Security*, 40(3), (Winter 2015/16): 7-53.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

Russia-China-US bewildered engagement and its exclusive role in shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order.

### **Significance of International Organizations in the World Order**

In the post WW-II era, based on the overwhelming military and economic supremacy, the US established itself as the most dominant actor of the international system. Maintaining the biggest monetary reserves with half of the share in world economy; the American-Dollar outplayed the British-Pound as the reserve currency of the international economic system.<sup>6</sup> In addition to its indisputable worldwide military dominance; Washington also ensured supremacy in global security and financial institutions like the; United Nations, UN Security Council, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. It can be stated that these IOs were effectively serving as the outfits of American global hegemony.<sup>7</sup> The US also undertook the responsibility of resurrecting the overwhelmingly war-trodden economies of its allies.<sup>8</sup> Washington also formed a comprehensive framework of alliances; many of them are still functional, to ensure stability in Europe and East-Asia. The post WW-II world order was also reinforced by the US through employing its soft power that aimed at broadcasting the ideological, political and cultural appeal all over the globe.<sup>9</sup> The US also played a leading role in establishing the major IOs and their further promotion through laws, values and norms; which in turn buttressed the American worldwide hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

The hegemonic stability theory model may well explain the formulation of Pax-Americana; as the model holds that the presence of a hegemon in the world better serves in managing and further stabilizing the global system, primarily its political and economic structures.<sup>11</sup> The American hegemonic triumphalism in the post-Cold War era can be condensed by stating that, following the Soviet disintegration, as the benefactor of worldwide security and the ultimate manager of the transnational economy; the US, in essence, acted as the de-facto government of the global system.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in fiscal downturn, the hegemon has to undertake the responsibility of formulating

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<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Carbaugh & David W. Hedrick, "Will the Dollar be dethroned as the Main Reserve Currency?" *Global Economy Journal*, 9(3), (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Yilmaz & Li (2020): 1-22.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil Bohanon, "Economic recovery: Lessons from the post-World War II period," (George Mason University, September 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno, "US hegemony and international organizations: The United States and multilateral institutions", (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Gilpin, "US Power Multinational Corp" vol. 2, (Basic Books, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Mandelbaum, M., The case for Goliath: How America acts as the world's government in the twenty-first century, *Public Affairs*, (2005).

the rules of business for the global economic order. It has to kick-start the world market as a last resort for the goods from other suffering economies by cheering imports from them and providing a reserve currency to the international economy.<sup>13</sup> Militarily, the hegemon has to ensure the worldwide stability by safeguarding the transnational communication lanes, the global commons, which are vital for an open international economy and free movement of intercontinental trade.<sup>14</sup>

The US can be rated as more or less successful in undertaking these perplexed assignments in the post WW-II era. However, since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Pax-Americana has been consistently challenged by the internal and external trials; and its hegemonic capability of exclusively performing such bewildered assignments in future is quite uncertain.<sup>15</sup>

### **Chinese Drive of Polarization thru Institutionalization**

One of the most vital aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order is the complex engagement amid the emerging powers from the “Rest”, particularly China and the declining “West”; mainly, the US.<sup>16</sup> This interface would not be mere an economic and military antagonism between the rising and retiring hegemons. Perhaps, it may be a series of happenings that would prove as the trailer of an overriding transition of the world system from the American hegemonic triumphalism to declinism. Traditionally, a waning hegemon is replaced or joined by another one or more ambitiously rising great powers. Generally the transition takes place amid catastrophic conflicts; as stated by Graham Allison that 12 out of 16 transitions in global system are conflictual.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, until now the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order is portrayed to be an exceptional case because the most prominent emerging power, China, has repeatedly asserted that its rise will be peaceful.<sup>18</sup>

In the past few decades China has launched a number of economic, political and security initiatives that would ultimately help in implementing Beijing’s transnational agenda. All these enterprises, Fareed Zakaria argues, may enable China to first place itself at an advantageous position in global system and then challenge the contemporary world system and with the help of its strategic allies, Beijing may even go up to paralyze the existing world

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Layne, “Avoiding a Sino-American Confrontation why the US should Accommodate a Rising China,” *Atlantisch Perspectief*, (4), (2015): 3-8

<sup>14</sup> Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony. *International security*, 28(1), (2003): 5-46.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Layne, “The US–Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax-Americana, *International Affairs*, 94(1), (2018): 89-111.

<sup>16</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think?* (Marshall Cavendish Intl. Asia Pte Ltd., 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’ Trap?* (2017): Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>18</sup> Barry Buzan, “China in International Society: Is ‘Peaceful RISE’ possible?” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3(1), (2010): 5-36.

order.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, the increasingly under pressure Washington, for its internal and external challenges, may also threaten to pullout its worldwide support; the global system may collapse in both these critical scenarios.<sup>20</sup> China may also opt the strategy of launching new hub of parallel transnational institutions like the; SCO, AIIB and BRI; that will be comparatively more catching for those nations which are already weary of the existing system.<sup>21</sup> The China sponsored new transnational organizations would enable it to expand Beijing's worldwide influence, particularly in Eurasia and Africa. Then China may demand radical changes in the existing world order, where the US has held a dominant position for decades. Eventually, these scenarios may lead international system to new multipolar or multicentric world order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

### **The “America First” Regime Echoes the US Hegemonic Decline**

The American inward looking policy not only signals the degeneration of greater Pax-Americana; but also supplements China's desire of leadership role world over.<sup>23</sup> The US president Donald Trump's election slogan in 2016, 'America First' was enough to send an underlying message to the American rivals and allies in Europe and Asia to look for their own engagements with rapidly rising China and newly assertive Russia.<sup>24</sup> Philip Stephens, a prominent analyst and foreign affairs columnist for the Financial Times; has identified that the Trump's policy of “America First” promotes belligerent isolationism of the United States.<sup>25</sup> Similarly the American passive response to the COVID-19 has also frustrated various nations including its allies in Europe; for Washington's inability to play a global leadership role.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, China offered exclusive support to

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<sup>19</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “We have to Look beyond the Madness,” *The Washington Post*, (September 6, 2018) Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew F. Cooper & Yanbing Zhang, “Chinese Leadership in the Evolution of “Hub” and “Parallel” Globally Oriented Institutions” *Chinese Political Science Review*, (2018): 3(1), 28-47.

<sup>22</sup> David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, vol. 409, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

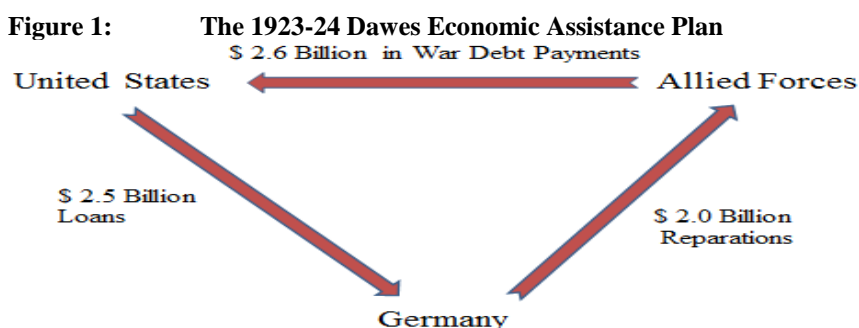
<sup>23</sup> Paul Street, *The world will not mourn the decline of U.S. hegemony. Common Dreams*. (2018, February 22). Retrieved from <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/02/22/world-will-not-mourn-decline-us-hegemony>

<sup>24</sup> David Ignatius, “What President Trump's Foreign Policy will Look Like,” *Washington Post*. (Nov. 9, 2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/>

<sup>25</sup> Paul Stephens, “America can Survive Trump. Not so the West”. *Financial Times*. (Nov. 10, 2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/73313d4c-a68e-11e6-8898-79a99e2a4def>

<sup>26</sup> Robbie Gramer, Morten Soendergaard Larsen, “China Casts itself as Global Savior, while the US and EU Focus on Virus at Home,” *Foreign Policy*, (2020): 19.

various stakeholders and it has smartly capitalised the universal challenge of Coronavirus to a kind of opportunity, in order to mark itself as the “global savior.”<sup>27</sup> A parallel may be drawn between the American 20<sup>th</sup> century politics and the Chinese approach to the devastating COVID-19. The US employed the 1923-24 Dawes Plan<sup>28</sup> and Marshall Plan<sup>29</sup> strategies for the down trodden European economies. Just like Washington, Beijing may also aim to level ground for expanding its transnational influence through economic assistance to the affecties of Coronavirus pandemic.



Hence, it can be argued that the Pax-Americana, constructed in the post WW-II era, is on the collapsing trajectory due to the highly upsetting internal and external challenges to Washington.<sup>30</sup>

### Challenges to the Pax-Americana

China and Russia, since last few decades, have launched an enterprise to the majority of key pillars to the Pax-Americana like; military, economic, institutional and ideational. In such critical circumstances the fundamental question arises that in case the challengers, mainly China exceeds, equals or even approximates its overall power to that of the US in these areas, will the Pax-Americana sustain any further? Though, such inquiries have wider implications, but for the Americans it is a highly contentious issue. A former US diplomat, Jon Huntsman categorically argues that the decline is un-

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Schuker, Stephen A. *American "reparations" to Germany, 1919-33: implications for the Third-World debt crisis*, (Princeton, NJ: International Finance Section, Department of Economics, Princeton University, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Xi v Marshall, "Will China's Belt and Road Initiative Outdo the Marshall Plan? How China's infrastructure projects around the world stack up against America's plan to rebuild post-war Europe, *The Economist*. (2018, March 8): Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2018/03/08/will-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-outdo-the-marshall-plan>

<sup>30</sup> Layne, (2018): 89-111.

American.<sup>31</sup> Some of the high rank officials still believe in the American unipolar fantasy; however, empirically such claims are unconvincing and even suspicious.<sup>32</sup> The ever growing volume of China's GDP, its share in global trade, an annually 10 percent increase in its military spending since last two decades and the rapidly narrowing gape of the US power; are the eye-opener for Washington and the whole world.<sup>33</sup>

United States has been confronting grave internal and external challenges since last two decades. The shrinking economy, the mounting debts and trade deficit, the growing concerns on job security and the inflow of immigrants, the overstretched worldwide military commitments and their pressure on the overall economy; are exerting immense burden on Washington. At the same time the US has also been facing highly precarious external challenges.<sup>34</sup> The American military dominance in East-Asia is consistently flouted by China through its encroachment strategy, particularly in the South China Sea. The Chinese economic boom, its rapidly infusing hard and soft power; the budding Russian tactical influence in Eurasian region and the growing Sino-Russian strategic alignment are highly serious challenges to the Pax-Americana.

### **Military Challenges to the American Hegemony**

The US foreign policy establishment believes that despite all the debates about the decline; even then the advantage in American military dominance has been undefeatable; and it will continue for a significant time-frame in future<sup>35</sup>. The American policy-makers and security studies experts are of the view that military power is their geopolitical trump card and it will certainly ensure Washington's lasting supremacy even if its competitors get closer to the economic and technological advancement of the US.<sup>36</sup>

The argument of American hegemonic decline revolves around a highly critical question of how long its competitors, mainly China, would take to match with the US military power. Some of the studies on the Sino-US military power balancing identify that the two great powers confront dissimilar geo-strategic challenges.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese strategic goals are

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<sup>31</sup> Patrick Porter, *"The Global Village Myth: Distance, War, and the Limits of Power,"* (Georgetown University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Chapman, Bert, "China's Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win." (2019). Retrieved from: [https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_FINAL\\_5MB\\_20190103.pdf](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Layne, 56(1), (2012): 203-213.

<sup>35</sup> Justin Lynch, "The Myth of American Military Dominance," *War on the Rocks*, (August 15, 2019). Retrieved from: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/the-myth-of-american-military-dominance/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Robert D. Blackwill & Ashley J. Tellis, *'Revising US Grand Strategy toward China,'* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015).

currently believed to be more limited than the US. For Beijing, the main strategic objective is to dominate its own geographic backyard in south-east Asia. Since, China believes that establishing regional hegemony in the area would be the foundation of its global doctrine and south-east Asia might be the pivot of Sino-US worldwide geopolitical competition.<sup>38</sup>

Though, China currently may not be capable of launching an all-out global challenge to the American hegemony; there are palpable indications that it has started to draw levels with the US military power in East-Asia.<sup>39</sup> The RAND Corporation, an American global policy think tank, in its recent study on the Sino-US balance of power has referred to the overall receding trend in Washington's military supremacy in East-Asian region.<sup>40</sup> However, China could not yet seal the gap with the US; yet it has quite rapidly narrowed the breach. It can be estimated that in the coming years China would be capable of challenging the American status-quo in the Far East.

The US Defense Department in "*Annual Report to Congress; military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China 2019*" identifies that since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has scrupulously benefited from, what it calls the "period of strategic opportunity"<sup>41</sup>. Beijing aims at indigenously developed industry to multiply its overall national power.<sup>42</sup> In the coming decades, its leadership would be concentrating more on progressive, prosperous and powerful China, backed by a world-class military. Beijing also aims to implement the long term strategies like, "made in China 2025" and other industrial development plans to swap the foreign defense equipment with the indigenous paraphernalia.<sup>43</sup> These renovation and indigenization measures are certainly economic and strategic challenges to the US and its worldwide military supremacy.<sup>44</sup>

The policies of Chinese growing economic, diplomatic and military clout may ultimately seek to establish regional supremacy and expanding its

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Cheng, "China's Regional Strategy and Challenges in East Asia," *China Perspectives*, 2, (2013): 53-65.

<sup>40</sup> Heginbotham, E., Nixon, M., Morgan, F. E., Heim, J. L., Hagen, J., Li, S., & Frelinger, "The US-China military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017". (Rand Corporation, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Kerry Brown, "Xi Jinping in 2017: The World's Luckiest Man, Period of strategic opportunity". *The Diplomat* (December 16, 2017). Retrieved from: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/xi-jinping-in-2017-the-worlds-luckiest-man/>

<sup>42</sup> US Department of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, (2019).

<sup>43</sup> James McBride & Andrew Chatzky, "Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, (2018) Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/made-china-2025-threat-global-trade> accessed October 10, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Uchitelle, "The US Still Leans on the Military-Industrial Complex" *The New York Times*, 22. (2017).



worldwide influence. The multinational nonmilitary initiatives; like the BRI, would eventually necessitate China's overseas military basing on the plea of security to these mega projects, which again would be a challenge for the US.<sup>45</sup> Beijing is rigid in its territorial claims; yet its tactics are too calculated to offend Washington, a key stakeholder in the Asia-Pacific region. China's ultimate aim is to make the People's Liberation Army capable of fighting and waging wars against the rivals, deter potential adversaries including the US and to ensure safeguarding China's national interests all around.<sup>46</sup>

### **China's Economic Challenge to the US Hegemony**

The Great Recession of 2008 has bitterly affected the hegemonic role of the US across the world<sup>47</sup>. It has directed the focus of attention towards the internal and external challenges of the US and its diminishing economic supremacy. The global economic downturn may quicken the US declinism that would be chipping away the other pillars of Pax-Americana. The Slump, from various aspects, has elucidated that the US is no more capable of being the manager of the global economy. Instead of causing, the economic hegemon has to resolve the global economic crisis; it has to be the lender of last resort and not the debtor; whereas, the US has turned out to be the world's largest debtor and China the largest creditor.<sup>48</sup> At the G-20 summit of 2009 in London, the US demanded to attain rebalancing of the global economy by persuading the Europeans, particularly Germany, to export less and import or consume more from Washington; Angela Merkel, plainly rejected this petition that indicates Washington's fading ability of acting as the frontrunner of the global economy.<sup>49</sup>

On the contrary, the rapidly rising China is fiercely challenging the US-led liberal hegemonic order. Since last decade, China has been taking away the top positions in various disciplines of the global economy. By 2010, *The Wall Street Journal* announced that China has surpassed Germany in the world exports<sup>50</sup> and by 2014 *The Guardian* declared that after passing the

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<sup>45</sup> US Department of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, (2019).

<sup>46</sup> Scott W. Harold, 'Defeat, Not Merely Compete: China's View of Its Military Aerospace Goals and Requirements in Relation to the United States' (No. RR2588). (RAND Corp Santa Monica United States, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The 2008 World Economic Crisis: Global Shifts and Fault Lines", *Global Research*, (February 15, 2009). Retrieved from: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-2008-world-economic-crisis-global-shifts-and-faultlines/12283>.

<sup>48</sup> Shalendra D. Sharma, "China as the World's Creditor and the United States as the World's Debtor: Implications for Sino-American Relations", *China Perspectives*, 4, (2010).

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Kulish & Judy Dempsey, "Merkel is set to Greet, and then Resist, Obama". *The New York Times*, 29(03). (2009).

<sup>50</sup> John W. Miller & Marcus Walker, "China Dethrones Germany as Top Goods Exporter", *The Wall Street Journal*, A6, (2010).

US, China has become the world's largest trading nation.<sup>51</sup> Finally China crossed the US in manufacturing, a title the US had held for around a century.<sup>52</sup> The World Bank in its 2014 report declared that China, by crossing the US had grabbed the title of being the largest global economy in purchasing power parity.<sup>53</sup> The Bank also predicted that by mid-2020s, China would overtake the US in GDP and acquire the status of the largest economy in the world as measured by global market exchange rate.<sup>54</sup>

These gains will certainly yield massive geostrategic advantage to China against the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order. Through a highly sensational statement in July 2017; Christine Lagarde, the IMF's managing director, stated that according to the by-laws, the IMF headquarters may be repositioned in next 10 years to another member country that enjoy the status of being the largest economy, most likely to be in China.<sup>55</sup> These indicators specify that the US economy is relatively declining; while its primacists have been presenting numerous crafty opinions. Apart from economic genius China is rapidly modernizing its industry through scientific innovation in various key areas, which in turn are certainly pressurizing the American economy and its establishment.<sup>56</sup>

The plummeting ability of the US to manage the international economy and the rapid rise of China will obviously have profound implications on the dynamics of strategic balance between the two great powers. In this regard China has made a lot of ground to turn the situation in its own favor at various levels. The contemporary economic trends suggest that large number of states would be inexorably drawn into geopolitical orbit of China for overwhelming magnetic pull of its economic bloom. The American global economic sway is gradually shrinking, while that of China is mounting dramatically; as its exports has risen from US\$ 200 billion to 2.4 trillion during 1995-2017.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Monaghan, "China Surpasses US as World's Largest Trading Nation", *The Guardian*, (January 10, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> West, D., & Lansang, C. *Global Manufacturing Scorecard: How the US compares to 18 other nations*, (Brookings, July, 10. 2018).

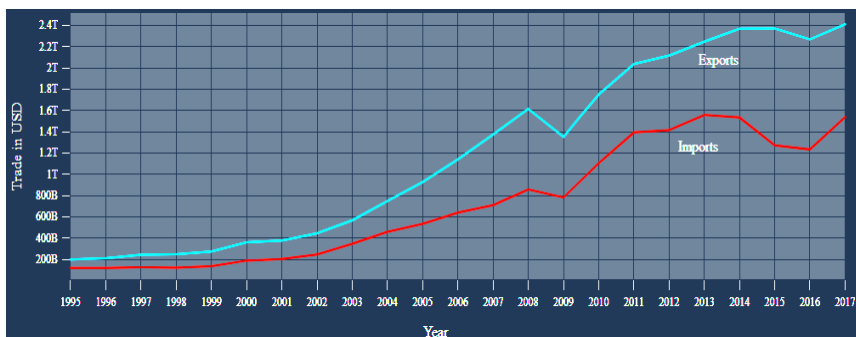
<sup>53</sup> Fray, K., China's leap forward: overtaking the US as world's biggest economy. *Financial Times*, (October 8, 2014)

<sup>54</sup> Layne, (2018): 89-111.

<sup>55</sup> Lagarde, C., IMF could be based in Beijing in a decade. *Reuters*, (July 24, 2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-imf-china-lagarde-idUSKBN1A922L>

<sup>56</sup> Layne, (2018): 89-111.

<sup>57</sup> Retrieved from: <https://oec.world/en/visualize/line/hs92/show/chn/all/all/1995.2017/>

**Figure2: A Comparison of Chinese Exports and Imports 1995-2017**

### **Institutional Challenges to the Pax-Americana**

The Pax-Americana was established on the basis of the economic, military and geostrategic ascendancy of the US; in addition to its dominant role in the international monetary and security institutions. China also understands that its rise to the status of a superpower is sturdily coupled with the same variables of power; therefore Beijing has already launched a series of institutional frameworks that would challenge the US-led hegemonic world order. Just like the occurrence of the Pax-Americana on institutional pillars, its erosion may also lie in the weakening of its legacy in key IOs. China seems to be alert of the fact that the likelihood of transition in the existing world order would happen through transnational institutions.

China, along with other emerging powers demand fundamental reforms in the world's economic and security institutions like; the IMF, World Bank, the UNSC and others for ensuring better and greater role of these great powers. One of the key indicators of the global power balancing swing is the conversion of G-8 into G-20 on the insistence of China in 2008 global economic summit.<sup>58</sup> The advent of G-20 also establishes necessity of yielding the global economic power to the emerging nations, especially China, which ultimately confirms the relative decline of the US. It also underlined that the shift in global economic power is correspondingly taking place from the “West” to the “Rest”, especially in Asia. Since, Japan had been the only Asian member of G-8; while the G-20 comprises one third of its members from Asia. Being a principal organ of global economy, the G-20 confirms that after the 2008 Great Recession, the US-EU nexus has dramatically slipped away from playing its worldwide stewardship role.<sup>59</sup>

The China sponsored transnational initiatives like; SCO, AIIB, BRI and BRICS; may potentially constitute a shadow or parallel world order outside

<sup>58</sup> Schmucker, C., & Gnath, K. From the G8 to the G-20: reforming the global economic governance system. In *European Yearbook of International Economic Law*, (Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2011): 389-402.

<sup>59</sup> Wolf, M. Three years and new fault lines threaten. *Financial Times*, 13, (2010): 39-41.

the precincts of the contemporary global structure.<sup>60</sup> Though, neither the existing power nor the ultimate objectives of these institutions is certain so far; however, their symbolic role in the present world system and their future role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order might be significant. For the declining Pax-Americana; they accentuate the degeneration of the US designed and dominated post WW-II liberal international order; and for the “Rest” or the emerging powers, these institutions are the symbol of recognition of their status and prestige in the future world system.<sup>61</sup>

### **The SCO as a Geopolitical Challenge**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is basically a China-lead and Russia backed Eurasian political and security institution. The primary objective of SCO was to maintain regional peace and promote cooperation among the member states against terrorism and security threats; for growing significance in Eurasia, it is generally labeled as the "alliance of the East".<sup>62</sup> It is viewed as the largest regional organization in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering around 50 percent of the Eurasian landmass, the world population and energy reserves.<sup>63</sup> Such a massive alliance in the East, where China and Russia are having central role is certainly a challenge for US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order.

In the post 9/11 international politics, one of the worst terror affected regions comprised of the SCO countries. In the ‘War on Terror’ its members individually decided to collaborate with the US-led NATO forces; in fact few of them offered military and logistic support to the ISAF.<sup>64</sup> However, the long-term American presence and its growing influence in the region started intimidating Beijing and Moscow; they ultimately decided to revive the structure of SCO with an increased prominence for its contribution as a coalition to counter-terror campaign. The broader analysis of SCO reveals its unique inter-state partnership, providing an institutional platform for wider regional economic, political, security and cultural cooperation. It is an exceptional model of regionalism within the context of the contemporary realities of Eurasian zone.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Chin, G., & Thakur, R. Will China change the rules of global order?. *The Washington Quarterly*, 33(4), (2010): 119-138.

<sup>61</sup> Park, I. "US-China competition in Asia-Pacific region: The AIIB and the New Global Order?" (City College of New York, 2016). Retrieved from: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1597&context=cc\\_etds\\_theses](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1597&context=cc_etds_theses)

<sup>62</sup> Bhadrakumar, M. K. The new ‘NATO of the East’ takes shape: The SCO and China, Russia, and US Maneuvers. *The Asia-Pacific Journal/ Japan Focus*, 5(8),(2007)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Faisal Javaid & Mamnoon Ahmed, “The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with special reference to US Rivalry towards Central Asia”, *International Research Journal of Social Sciences* .4(3), 5, (2015): 58-63.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Keeping in view the dynamics of 21<sup>st</sup> century world order, the SCO has got a highly significant status at the regional and global levels. The major emerging powers; China and Russia are its key members, with ever growing sense of multifaceted cooperation. The Beijing initiated BRI is going to help in further strengthening the connectivity among its members and also with the Western Europe. Above all, the SCO aims to obtain common political and security objectives; along with its efforts for searching the optimum level of contrivance to expand the economic ties, strengthening cultural bonds and humanitarian interactions among its members.<sup>66</sup>

The formulation of SCO could possibly be the first experience of transnational engagement of alliance-making that is based on an equal partnership among states of different sizes, with varying degree of political influence, varied economic potentials, and diverse cultural and civilizational features. The enormous geographical structure of SCO may accentuate the likelihood of a thoroughly connected Eurasian continent, as an epicenter of world's energy and population hubs. The SCO will obviously provide common platform to the member states to reinforce their strategic ties that would obviously perplex the West in general and the US in specific.<sup>67</sup> However, this rosy picture may also get withered in the coming decades; for conflict of interests and rivalries amid different members of the SCO like; India-China, and India-Pakistan; could hamper its smooth functioning.

### **The AIIB as Economic and Political Challenge**

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a Chinese initiated transnational body with primary objective to foster viable infrastructure expansion as well as connectivity in Asia. The bank aims to offer massive investment capital in energy, maritime and land routes among various countries, mainly in Eurasia. It also aims to promote regional cooperation and partnership to address the future development challenges and to create an environment of closer cooperation with other key bilateral and multilateral development institutions. The AIIB is the first non-Western financial institution, established on the initiative of emerging economic superpower, China. This multinational body has 84 members; out of them 48 are regional and 36 non regional countries; including 14 EU member states. The financial resources of AIIB are over US\$ 100 billion with 20 percent paid-in and 80 percent callable amount; with China, India, Russia and Germany as the biggest shareholders.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Alimov, R. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its role and place in the development of Eurasia. *Journal of Eurasian studies*, 9(2), (2018): 114-124.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Notes, E. S., The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. A new multilateral financial institution or a vehicle for China's geostrategic goals. European Political Strategy Centre. *European Political Strategy Centre*, (1), 24, (2015).

The AIIB would be a game-changer of financing the multidimensional development in global infrastructure networks. Since, its early signs point to the China's derive of using the project not only for economic development but also for pursuing far reaching political interests in Eurasia. The bank is essentially a driver of accelerating the Beijing's plans for reviving as well as revitalizing the new 'Silk Road' connecting Asia and Europe. It also reflects the greater economic significance of the rapidly emerging markets in general and that of China in specific. The AIIB, along with the other key China-led initiatives currently have an overall collective capital base of US\$ 250 billion, which is roughly equivalent to that of the World Bank.<sup>69</sup>

The foundation of such transnational institutions certainly reflects the mounting discontent of rising great powers in the existing global institutions as well as the growing economic power of China. Being one of the top two world economies, Beijing has been complaining for her under representation in the international financial institutions; mainly in the IMF and World Bank. China and other emerging markets complain their inadequate sway in major IOs and they are also unhappy with the meager pace of reforms in addressing the unbalancing practices. Therefore, the AIIB could be in some measures an economic vehicle of regional economic and infrastructure development. However, it may also be an instrument of pursuing the long term and wider geo-political interests of China at the regional and global levels; hence, the US and Japan are reluctant to join the Bank.<sup>70</sup>

The AIIB has obviously triggered a sense of nervousness among the icons of the contemporary economic order like; the US, Japan and others as they considered it the preamble of China-led new multipolar world.<sup>71</sup> It is only another exhibition of China's quest for extending unmatched financial and tactical capabilities to other Asian states for the development of vital infrastructure and broader economic capabilities. The EU seems to be in a perplexed situation; on the one hand to welcome the AIIB as a global financial balancing mechanism and on the other hand, the bank is going to shift the world economic center away from the West. In short, the development of the AIIB signals that the Sino-US balance of power, both in economic and geostrategic terms, is now relatively tilting towards Beijing.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Geostrategic Challenge: BRI**

The Belt and Road Initiative also referred as the 'New Silk Road' is yet another one of the most significant enterprises of China's ambitious future

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Etzioni, A., The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: a case study of multifaceted containment. *Asian Perspective*, 40(2), (2016): 173-196.

<sup>71</sup> Rein, S. *The War for China's Wallet: Profiting from the New World Order*, (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> Notes, E. S. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. A new multilateral financial institution or a vehicle for China's geostrategic goals. European Political Strategy Centre. *European Political Strategy Centre*, (1), 24, (2015).

goals and the continuation of AIIB. The BRI is a signature policy of China that calls for the multibillion dollars investment (up to US\$ 1 trillion) to stimulate a massive trade and economic development plan.<sup>73</sup> The prime objective of the mega project is to construct trade and shipping routes, ultimately aiming to integrate the industrial hubs of emerging economies in Europe and East-Asia with consumer markets and raw material producers in Asia and Africa. The developmental aspects of BRI may be viewed as Chin's version of a new Marshall Plan, the post WW-II American initiative; rather it may be even of much grander significance.<sup>74</sup> It is also professed as an instrument of Chinese expanding geopolitical influence in different regions. Several references may suggest that the initiative is part of the Beijing's strategy to cement its supremacy over the Eurasian 'heartland'. The AIIB and BRI would indicate the declining American economic and strategic supremacy.<sup>75</sup> These transnational mega initiatives may also challenge the Pax-Americana, in geopolitical, global economic leadership and in the hierarchy of international institutions. Although, in the debates of Sino-US rivalry, the economic perspective is slightly overshadowed by the military balance of power amid Beijing and Washington, predominantly around the strategic theaters of; Taiwan, South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Korean peninsula; since these flashpoints could spark devastating conflict between two superpowers of the future world system.<sup>76</sup>

### **Sino-Russian Axis: A Grand Challenge to the US Hegemony**

The growing strategic partnership between China and Russia can be viewed in reference to the balance of power mechanism amid US-China-Russia; the existing hegemon, the ascending superpower and the resurging or reasserting key, respectively. Beijing and Moscow have the history of being the world's superpowers; however since the era of Pax-Americana, the two Eurasian players were ardently marginalized by Washington. In its unipolar fantasy, the US militarily over-engaged itself in Afghanistan and Iraq; whereas China and Russia started promptly asserting their influence on the world stage. In an era of declining American hegemony; the rapidly rising China and the resurging Russia are looking to transform the existing world order. Hence, the likelihood of shifting the epicenter of global politics from the "West" to the "Rest" is too evident.

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<sup>73</sup> Layne, (2018): 89-111.

<sup>74</sup> Xi v Marshall, Will China's Belt and Road Initiative outdo the Marshall Plan? How China's infrastructure projects around the world stack up against America's plan to rebuild post-war Europe, *The Economist*. (2018, March 8). Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2018/03/08/will-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-outdo-the-marshall-plan>

<sup>75</sup> Layne, (2018): 89-111.

<sup>76</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3(4), (2010): 381-396.

The rapidly emerging developments and the associated debates like; the American inability to avert or overcome the Great Recession, the expansion of G-8 to G-20, the discussions about the reforms or review of the UNSC and the growing literature on the US hegemonic declinism; are the symptoms of multilateral world system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The wide-ranging symmetry between Beijing and Moscow in formulating major blocks like SCO, BRICS, AIIB, NDB and BRI also signpost the strategic partnership of the two Eurasian great powers.<sup>77</sup> The deepening and broadening of the Sino-Russian ties have more adverse implications for the US; rather the main driver of this strategic cooperation is their rivalry against Washington. The Sino-Russian strategic ties would be mainly based on common objectives, values and the perceived exposure to the US and Western pressures in various social and political issues; and the visions of the two emerging great powers to expand their influence at the expense of the decline of the US-led world order.<sup>78</sup>

The partnership between China and Russia developed in the post-Cold War era; has been further broadened since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The current leadership of the two countries; President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin; support stronger bilateral relations, based on the common objectives, values along with common challenges and opportunities, in special reference to the American hegemony and its subsequent decline. The growing alignment amid China and Russia no longer is only an “axis of convenience” having too much narrow impact on the affairs of world order; instead the cooperation seems meaningful, extensive and result oriented.<sup>79</sup> The Sino-Russian ties are meant to challenge the American hegemony and reshape the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order. The display of such objectives was noticeable in the 2018 Russian military exercise, Vostok, under the “joint” command; the exercise was bigger than any previous Russian military drills since the end of Cold War; again a matter of greater concern for the US.<sup>80</sup> The Sino-Russian cooperation challenges the US-led world order in their respective spheres of priorities and concerns. Russia is asserting itself in Europe and the Middle East to counterbalance the American ascendancy; while China is trying to defuse the American supremacy in a number of regions, particularly in the Indo-Pacific along the China’s continental and maritime peripheries. The challenges that Russia has to deal with encompass

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<sup>77</sup> Carsten Rauch & Iris Wurm, “Making the World Safe for Power Transition-Towards a Conceptual Combination of Power Transition Theory and Hegemony Theory” *Journal of Global Faultlines*, 1(1), (2013): 50-69.

<sup>78</sup> Andrea Kendall-Taylor, “An Emerging China-Russia Axis?: Implications for the US in an Era of Strategic Competition”. Statement before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. (2019). Retrieved from: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Sutter\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Sutter_Testimony.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Yu Bin, “Crouching army, hidden alliance?” *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, 20(3). (2019).



the military and paramilitary actions in Europe and the Middle East. Moscow is also engaged in cyber and political warfare, of varied intensity and goals, aiming to undermine the harmony of NATO, the cohesion of EU and the internal sociopolitical dynamics of the US.<sup>81</sup> China is engaged in undermining the resolve of the US and its allies through covert and overt means of manipulation. The key characteristic of the Chinese strategic incursion is to launch the soft power drive against the US by employing economic incentives and propaganda campaign<sup>82</sup>.

The American officials have repeatedly complained about the cyber-attacks for stealing substantial strategic information and intellectual property rights. Beijing, allegedly, fixes all these steps in order to foster its technological and economic competitiveness and ultimately to dominate the global trade and intellectual markets.<sup>83</sup> It is also perceived that the China's act of intimidating the neighbors by an extraordinary buildup of its military forces is eventually helping Beijing to expand its regional influence. These clandestine tactics also support China in advancing its military industrial complex, at the expense of leading American and other multinational companies. *The Japan Times* reports that the designs of Chinese developed "fifth-generation" fighter jets; the J-20 and J-31; are the prototype design of the American F-35 stealth fighter; and the design was stolen by the Chinese hackers from the Lockheed, a leading US jet fighters production company.<sup>84</sup>

China and Russia are separately and collectively engaged in confounding and curtailing the American hegemony; its influence in global political, economic and security issues. In synchronized moves they support each other in their corresponding challenges posed against the US and its close allies in Europe, the Middle East and different regions of Asia. These collective efforts from the two emerging great powers also encompass the diplomatic, security and economic agencies in multidimensional forums. The two Eurasian powers also support one another in the issues confronting the US and the allied grievances about the Russian and Chinese coercive expansion in various regions. They also complement each other in other measures that are challenging the regional order and the global norms in addition to the American backed transnational institutions. They also incorporate bilateral relations with various actors mostly involving the opponents of the US, particularly those in Tehran, Pyongyang and Damascus; which are also openly challenging the American hegemony.

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<sup>81</sup> Kendall-Taylor, (2019).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Yu Bin, "Crouching army, Hidden Alliance?" *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, (2019): 20(3).

<sup>84</sup> Kyodo, "China stole F-35 Blueprints from Lockheed, Snowden data Appears to show. *The Japan Times*, (2015, January 19). Retrieved from: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/19/>, accessed on October 13, 2019.

Certainly these critical issues are severely embarrassing the US authorities like the frustration of Donald Trump can be easily observed in his regular tweets on China in 2017;

- 17 March: North Korea is behaving very badly. They have been ‘playing’ the United States for years. China has done little to help!
- 29 July: I am very disappointed in China. Our foolish past leaders have allowed them to make hundreds of billions of dollars a year in trade,
- 30 November: The Chinese Envoy, who just returned from North Korea, seems to have had no impact on Little Rocket Man ..... Russia and China condemned the launch.
- 28 December: Caught RED HANDED — very disappointed that China is allowing oil to go into North Korea.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

China and Russia have been diligently working together in reaction to the stronger pressure from Washington. They also support each other in their joint response on the hardening of American security, economic and political pressures on China and Russia and the two countries work together to counter the American interests. Beijing and Moscow are close partners in various areas of strategic, economic, political and even cultural harmony. They share common views on different regional and global issues, particularly in their response to the American worldwide supremacy.

However, in some of the areas things may not be as rosy as they are perceived; as the two players have been persistently avoiding entering in any substantial security alliance. They are unenthusiastic in taking extensive risks for supporting one another in the arenas where the prospects of overlapping their respective interests are unattractive. Long term vulnerabilities can also mar the relationships between the two countries like; the Russian dissatisfaction over its increasingly junior role to that of China may explode and eventually exploit the existing understanding between the two powers.

China and Russia have varied interests on the issues of preserving or perturbing the existing world order. They have different positions over the issue of regional expansion on the part of significant but smaller powers in Europe and Asia looking for the support of the US. The strategic ties between china and Russia are also short of laid down principles or parameters. The two powers also have the history of conventional rivalry and even a slight miscalculation on the part of any actor may eventually result into grave consequences.

The debate can be summed up by stating that any arrangement short of strategic alliance between China and Russia may not be adequate for

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<sup>85</sup> Trump, D. J. Donald J. Trump on Twitter: Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/810288321880555520?lang=en>

transforming the existing international system into a multipolar world order in future. Even if over the time they essentially succeed in undermining the American influence in some of the geopolitical regions, the chances of tensions amid them are also likely to grow than shrinking.

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