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OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**PAKISTAN'S SECURITY DILEMMA
IN THE ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

by

Ihtasham Sattar

December 2023

Co-Advisors:

Carolyn C. Halladay
Feroz H. Khan

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**PAKISTAN'S SECURITY DILEMMA IN THE ERA
OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

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Lieutenant Colonel, Pakistan Army
MDSS, National Defense University, Islamabad, 2011

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS)**

from the

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ABSTRACT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
A.	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	1
	1. Great Power Competition: Theoretical Application in Regional Construct	2
	2. India under Indo-Pacific Strategy: Shaping South Asia’s Security Calculus	7
	3. Contextualizing Pakistan’s Security Dilemma	9
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	12
D.	RESEARCH DESIGN	13
E.	THESIS OVERVIEW AND DRAFT CHAPTER OUTLINE	13
II.	THE DRAGON’S REACH: UNVEILING CHINA DREAM	15
A.	GPC: NAVIGATING CHINA DREAM.....	17
	1. Coalescing Grand Strategy: Insights from Past.....	17
	2. China Dream: Forging the Path Forward	19
	3. China’s South Asian Chessboard: Interests and Policy Goals.....	21
B.	CHINA-INDIA PUZZLE: FRIENDS OR RIVALS	23
	1. A Tale of Two Asian Giants	24
	2. India: The Elephant in China’s Strategic Room.....	27
	3. China: The Dragon at India’s Strategic Gate	29
C.	CONCLUSION	30
III.	THE U.S. INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY	33
A.	A POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC DRIVE	34
	1. A Consequential Geostrategic, Geopolitical, and Goeconomic Region	34
	2. Tracing the Development of the Indo-Pacific Vision	36
	3. Partners’ and Allies’ Perspectives.....	38
	4. India in the Indo-Pacific	40
B.	INDO-U.S. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP	43
C.	CONCLUSION	49
IV.	PAKISTAN’S SECURITY DILEMMA	51
A.	TAXONOMY OF PAKISTAN’S SECURITY DILEMMA	52

B.	IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN	57
1.	GPC	57
2.	Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership	61
C.	CONCLUSIONS	68
V.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	71
A.	OVERALL FINDINGS	71
B.	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	74
1.	Diversification of Relationships	74
2.	Balanced Engagement	75
3.	Rebuilding Relations with the United States	75
4.	Reordering China’s Priority	77
5.	India’s Influence: Charting Course	78
C.	CONCLUSION	78
	LIST OF REFERENCES	79
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	89

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASAT	Anti-satellite
ASEAN	Association of South East Nations
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BUILD	Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
DTTI	Defense Technology and Trade Initiative
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FOIP	Free and Open Indo Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPC	Great Power Competition
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
IADWS	Integrated Air Defense Weapon System
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
iCET	Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies
IEA	Information Exchange Annex
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
ISA	Industrial Security Annex

ISR	Intelligence, Reconnaissance, and Surveillance
LEAs	Law Enforcement Agencies
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
MSRA	Master Ship Repair Agreement
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
NASAMS	National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSG	Nuclear Supply Group
NSP	Net Security Provider
NSS	National Security Strategy
NSSP	Next Steps in Strategic Partnership agreement
NWFP	Northwest Frontier Post
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PAS	Pro Active Strategy
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
STA-1	Strategic Trade Authorization-1
UNSC	United Nation Security Council

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I. INTRODUCTION

How does great power competition (GPC), particularly between the United States and China, and the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership exacerbate Pakistan's security dilemma and what are some policy suggestions to balance relations and resolve this dilemma?

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research examines GPC while focusing on the challenges to uphold the balance of power for small, weak, or middle-power states like Pakistan in South Asia under the Indo-Pacific construct. The research aims to provide implications for Pakistan's interaction under GPC by drawing an analysis of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership which has significant security implications for Pakistan. It also draws the linkage of the bilateral strategic relationship and partnership on third country by highlighting the strategic linkage connecting Pakistan and India, India and China, and China and the United States—as well as the ensuing arms competition and attendant security dilemma.

The complex strategic quadrilateral relationship between these states, often referred to as an expanding systemic security dilemma, is intricate. It encourages them to explore different sets of strategies involving cooperation, competition, and containment. These actions may lead to conflicts among the states involved. Understanding the complexities of the resultant security dilemma will help policymakers to devise strategies for Pakistan to mitigate risks, manage alliances, and optimize balanced partnerships to resolve dilemmas through a well-rounded foreign policy approach that considers both great powers' interests.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive literature exists, dissecting the Indo-Pacific Strategy with emphasis on India's role and its strategic partnerships. However, scholarly discourse of analyzing how evolving GPC exacerbates Pakistan's security dilemma, especially Indo-U.S. collaboration under Indo-Pacific strategy, remains underexplored and necessitates drawing upon various literature. This section first covers GPC, examining its nuances, and drawing linkages for

South Asia. Constructs of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and its impact on regional balance of power with attendant security implications follows. The last subsection describes Pakistan’s security dilemma and how shifting equilibrium in favor of India compels Pakistan to make difficult policy choices.

1. Great Power Competition: Theoretical Application in Regional Construct

In the past decade, the global political landscape has increasingly exhibited the traits characterized by the GPC in which the United States and China compete for power, influence, status, and resources in the same geographical space through political, military, and economic instruments. This section captures discourse on the GPC by examining the nature of GPC, its key drivers, policy implications, role of weak states, and impact of GPC on regional construct of South Asia.

Scholars have elucidated GPC in various ways; however, most agree that the intensely competitive international environment underscores the imperative for a thorough understanding of the GPC’s nature to guide interactions among aspiring hegemons. Lynch identifies competition as a continuum with cooperation and confrontation at its extreme ends in an international system where great powers demonstrate attributes of capability, influence, and status through hard or soft power.¹ No broader understanding exists on notional and conceptual underpinnings of GPC, however, this thesis draws upon Pierce’s definition of GPC, which states:

The interaction among notably powerful nation-state actors capable of operating globally and on any dimension as a means of securing national interests and operational space while denying any other actors of relative power either the ability to dictate or shape the rules of the game (geopolitical economic, military, etc.) or to deny the cohesive pursuit of national interests, below the threshold of war.²

¹ Thomas F. Lynch, III, ed., *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2020), xiv.

² Dexe Pierce, “Defining Great Power Competition,” in *The Great Power Competition Volume 1*, eds. Adib Farhadi and Anthony J. Masys (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 241, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64473-4_12.

Mazarr defines four broad levels of competition among great powers: ongoing, persistent interstate to maximize power, pointed rivalries for system leadership, and fully militarized rivalries to use force for influence.³ Likewise, Tian Ye identifies “geopolitics, technology, and international institutions” as three prominent dimensions within the realm of GPC.⁴ Lynch highlights five distinct competition classifications: political and diplomatic, ideological, informational, military, and economic.⁵ Paradoxically, South Asian regional order experiences persistent (Pakistan and India) and pointed (China and India) rivalries with probability to lead toward militarized rivalries at one end while experiencing all forms of competition categories at the other.

The discourse surrounding the concept of GPC characterized by contrasting views from recognizing it as feature of the international environment to divergent opinions over its existence. The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) viewed the GPC as a critical element within the global environment.⁶ Emma Ashford similarly identifies GPC as endemic to the international environment and system feature.⁷ In contrast, former President Barak Obama in his book, *The Audacity to Hope*, highlights that GPC “no longer exists.”⁸ Diccico and Oneas contradict such opinions and define GPC as a “permanent, compulsory, comprehensive,

³ Michael J. Mazarr, “Understanding Competition: Great Power Rivalry in a Changing International Order—Concepts and Theories” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, n.d.), 3–7.

⁴ Tian Ye, “The Roots of Great Power Competition: An Analysis Based on the Increasing Returns Mechanism,” *Social Sciences in China* 43, no. 4 (2022): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2022.2166286>.

⁵ Lynch, *Strategic Assessment 2020*, xvi.

⁶ NSS (2017) used the term “great power competition” and the Biden administration’s Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (2021) used “strategic competition.”

⁷ Emma Ashford, “Great-Power Competition Is a Recipe for Disaster,” *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/01/china-usa-great-power-competition-recipe-for-disaster/>.

⁸ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006).

and exclusive contest for supremacy.”⁹ Ashford also endorses similar thoughts and opines that “competition among great powers cannot return because it never really went away.”¹⁰

In addition to the nature of GPC, scholars have identified various drivers of GPC including values, desire for power maximization, status, and ideologies. State dissatisfaction with status-quo escalated the phenomena of GPC; thus, great powers fight for supremacy in terms of power and status within the global or regional subsystem. Ye contends that divergent ideologies, values, and ideas engender GPC.¹¹ He further identifies structural contradictions brought on by shifts in relative power, the narrowing of the power gap, and the corresponding manifestation of “security dilemma” or “status anxiety” as the basis of GPC.¹² John Mearsheimer’s “bedrock” fundamental premise about absence of a central authority or a hierarchical structure within the international system, involving states possessing offensive military capabilities, often shrouded in deliberate intentional ambiguities, and their desire for survivability serve as drivers for great powers to maximize power and strive for hegemony.¹³ Wohlforth argues that the quest for hegemony and the apprehension stemming from the potential loss of dominance collide, sparking strategic rivalries among the great powers.¹⁴ Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson apportion strategic rivalries into spatial rivalries for the quest for territory through a partnership with other states and positional rivalries with the objective of securing international status.¹⁵ Thereby, the phenomenon of the GPC is driven by rising powers’ dissatisfaction over the existing order and intensified by divergent values and their pursuit of status.

⁹ Jonathan M. DiCicco and Tudor A. Onea, “Great-Power Competition,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, January 31, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.756>.

¹⁰ Ashford, “Great-Power Competition Is a Recipe for Disaster.”

¹¹ Ye, “The Roots of Great Power Competition,” 78.

¹² Ye, 77–78.

¹³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 30–31.

¹⁴ William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 27–31.

¹⁵ Michael P. Colaresi, Karen A. Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space and Conflict Escalation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 161–88.

The diverse perspectives highlight the complexity of the GPC and underscore the need for further exploration on policy discourse for states in the contemporary global landscape. GPC is likely to shape and change policies framework of states in international environment. Mazarr believes that future policy discourse among states will hinge on “strategic or great power competition.”¹⁶ The National Security Strategy of the United States issued in 2022 asserts that GPC entails reordering priorities and adjustment to policy and strategy.¹⁷ Pierce illustrates GPC anchored to national and foreign policy, and leveraging the spectrum of the exertion of power and influence through a combination of military and economic resources, demanding the involvement of all sectors of society.¹⁸ This multifaceted dimension of GPC likely challenges policy choices especially of weaker states to navigate complex strategic environment arising from intense competition.

Scholars are of the view that weak states’ policy choices in the context of GPC revolve around balancing, band wagoning, or hedging. Kassab contends that the behavior of weaker states could enhance the global influence of challenging states, consequently reshaping configuration of the international system.¹⁹ Ross posits that weaker states are more inclined to align themselves with and bandwagon stronger states rather than seeking a balance of power.²⁰ On the contrary, Stephen Walt believes weak states undertake balancing instead of band wagoning to avoid alliances.²¹ Goh claims that states opt for hedging as a foreign policy strategy due to the strategic uncertainties arising from China, that exhibits increased assertiveness and a perception of the U.S.’s decline.²² Felix Heiduk

¹⁶ Mazarr, “Understanding Competition,” 1.

¹⁷ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 6–13, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf>.

¹⁸ Pierce, “Defining Great Power Competition,” 33, 240.

¹⁹ Hanna Samir Kassab, *Weak States as Spheres of Great Power Competition* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003050414>.

²⁰ Robert S. Ross, “Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia,” *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 355, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410601028206>.

²¹ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security*, no. 4 (1985): 5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

²² Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 113–17.

argues persistence of a new form of Cold War, compelling states to align with either a Sino-centric or a U.S.-centric order, presenting a binary choice, thus becoming pawns in the GPC.²³ The complex dynamics of weak state behavior highlight the intricate choices these states navigate and the potential implications for the structure and alliances within the international system.

The Indo-Pacific region, with South Asia as its foundational essence, has emerged as a region of significant consequence, witnessing intensified GPC for status and influence. Farhadi opines that the Indo Pacific region explains revisionist China as a rising key competitor and resurgent Russia as an opportunist, both having “mutual distaste” for U.S. status, hegemony, and capability to extend and sustain power projection.²⁴ Ranneberger highlights that “geographical proximity, security concerns, commercial linkages, shared history, and cultural connections” make South Asia a “sphere of influence” in “near abroad” for China and Russia, which undermines U.S. alliances and partnerships and engages the latter in the zero-sum competition.²⁵ The paradigmatic geopolitical shift with China as rising power has reengineered the South Asia political dimension by instigating GPC concurrently at the global (China and the United States) and regional level (China and India).²⁶ Thus, geopolitical dynamics in the region shaped by the GPC constrain policy options for countries like Pakistan in the face of intensifying GPC.

²³ Felix Heiduk, *Asian Geopolitics and the U.S.-China Rivalry* (London: Routledge, 2021), 10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106814>.

²⁴ Adib Farhadi, “Conceptualizing the Great Power Competition and U.S. Goeconomic Strategy for the Central and South Asia (CASA) Region,” in *The Great Power Competition Volume 1*, ed. Adib Farhadi and Anthony J. Masys (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 32–37, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64473-4_2.

²⁵ Michael E. Ranneberger, “Seize the Opportunity: Craft a Smart Power Strategy for the Central Region,” in *The Great Power Competition Volume 1*, ed. Adib Farhadi and Anthony J. Masys (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 259–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64473-4_13.

²⁶ Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi and Nirmal, “Regional Political Paradigm Shift: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 7, no. 4 (2022): 773–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911221103358>.

2. India under Indo-Pacific Strategy: Shaping South Asia's Security Calculus

Great power rivalries, irredentist conflicts, territorial disputes, and inter-state wars define strategic outlook of South Asia and has been focus of studies by scholars. However, its distinct security dynamics under the rubric of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, strengthening of the Indo-U.S. collaboration, and strategic chain linking middle powers (India and Pakistan) in the region and their nexus with great powers (the United States and China) have not been amply analyzed and deliberated.

The transition of global power from the Western world to the Eastern world has led to the prominence of the Indo-Pacific as a region of consequence and primary arena for GPC with security, economics, and defense partnership at its core. In the NSS of 2022 the United States identifies China as the “only competitor” to the rule-based order and envisions “free, open, secure, and prosperous region.”²⁷ Moreso, the Indo-Pacific Strategy highlights building regional partnership and coalitions against assertive China to bolster security and shape international order.²⁸ By contrast, Heiduk and Wacker highlight the Chinese perspective, which regards U.S. strategy as aiming at maintaining supremacy in the region and containing the ascension of China as a major or influential global power.²⁹ Xi's policy of grand “China Dream” with “primacy in Asia” and “influence on world affairs” come in contestation with the United States.³⁰ Such divergent policies carry strategic ramifications for the countries within the broader Indo-Pacific region, with a specific focus on South Asia—it deepens regional rivalries by offsetting balance of power thus heightening existing dilemmas.

²⁷ Biden, National Security Strategy, 7–11.

²⁸ White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 7 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

²⁹ Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2020), 32, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/from-asia-pacific-to-indo-pacific>.

³⁰ Robert Sutter, “Xi Jinping's Vision of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Coherent Chinese Diplomatic Strategy?,” in *China's Grand Strategy: A Roadmap to Global Power?*, ed. David B. H. Denoon (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 68–71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftvrxr.7>.

Ascendence of China and its associated consequences has catalyzed a comprehensive alignment of U.S. and Indian interests, particularly in the context of the Indo-Pacific region—their defense partnership and security cooperation at its heart disturbs South Asia’s balance of power and breeds block politics. The Indo-Pacific Strategy reinforces India’s ongoing rise and its role as a regional leader.³¹ Mahrukh argues that the basis for the power struggle in South Asia and the exacerbation of Pakistan’s security disparity with India are rooted in the Indo-Pacific strategy.³² Khan also inscribes the change in India’s policy under Indo-Pacific Strategy, transitioning from non-alignment to a strategic partnership with the United States aimed at reconfiguring power dynamics and influencing the geopolitical landscape of South Asia in India’s favor.³³ Garver asserts that disputes over borders, regional geopolitical considerations, and economic rivalries, all exacerbated by China’s relationship with Pakistan and its activities in the Indian Ocean, which India views as its own sphere of influence, have played a pivotal role to induce a security dilemma for India and compels India toward increasing collaboration with the United States.³⁴ Chunhao Lou highlights that U.S. policy toward China encourages India to adopt adventurist policy toward China and intensifies bloc politics in South Asia.³⁵ Indo-U.S. collaboration impacts the fragile security calculus of South Asia especially with Pakistan leading to heightened possibilities of conflict in the region.

The strengthening of the Indo-U.S. alliance impacts Pakistan’s strategic interests. Hussain highlights that mutual alliance between India and the United States offsets the India-Pakistan power equilibrium—significantly impacting Pakistan’s interests,

³¹ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 7–16.

³² Mahrukh Khan, “U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy: Implications for South Asia,” *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1 (2021): 59–66, <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.041.01.0056>.

³³ Feroz Hassan Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2022), xiv–xv.

³⁴ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 22, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁵ Chunhao Lou, “Geopolitical ‘Entanglements’ and the China-India-Pakistan Nuclear Trilemma,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (3 July 2022): 283–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2156252>.

encompassing political, economic, security, and external relations.³⁶ Schmidt also believes that the GPC disturbs the balance of power, creates a security dilemma for Pakistan, and increases the chances of conflict and an arms race.³⁷ Sadaf, Sadia, and Javaria contend that Pakistan's position is akin to pinball, with China representing a formidable challenge, while fighting terrorism is a regional as well as a global security issue, that converges on the Indo-Pacific Region to form a basis for the signing of an "inter-regional strategic partnership" between India and the United States.³⁸ In response to China's expanding influence, the United States, its allies, and India are actively advocating for the concept of the Indo-Pacific that establishes New Delhi's position as a legitimate participant within the security framework of this emerging regional structure. These complex dynamics necessitate careful analysis of Pakistan's security dilemma and efforts to address the security challenges and ensure stability in the region.

3. Contextualizing Pakistan's Security Dilemma

The concept of security dilemma captures South Asia's unique power dynamics, where one state (India) seeking security (Indo-U.S. collaboration) from other state (China) creates imbalances with third state (Pakistan); this strategic security chain coupled with stability-instability paradox (China, India, and Pakistan all nuclear) complicates strategic stability of the region. Morgenthau's perspective suggests that states invariably seek to advance their security interests, often through actions that may be interpreted as aggressive. Paradoxically, this pursuit of enhanced security often results in a security dilemma, wherein efforts to bolster one's own security inadvertently force opponents to undertake similar arms build-up.³⁹ Such scholars as Walt, Waltz, and Weitsman consider alliances

³⁶ Syed Shahid Hussain Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Nuclear Politics and Security Competition*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2020), 20–22, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036920>.

³⁷ Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, "The Asia-Pacific Strategic Triangle: Unentangling the India, China, U.S. Relations on Conflict and Security in South Asia," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2014): 203–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797014536641>.

³⁸ Sadaf Farooq, Sadia Kazmi, and Javaria Javed, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Implications for Pakistan," *Policy Perspectives*: 15, no. 1 (2018): 6, <https://doi.org/10.13169/polipers.15.1.0003>.

³⁹ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 24.

as tools of statecraft by states to protect, further, and maximize their security against perceived threats.⁴⁰ Formulation of alliances or counter alliances in the view of Dwivedi, is response to security policies, enmities, and rivalries.⁴¹

In the context of Pakistan’s search for stability and its resulting security dilemma, various scholars offer insights into the factors contributing to the country’s situation. Heath explains the impact of strategic power competition on South Asia, with small regional countries like Pakistan forced to “take sides.”⁴² Talbot highlights that Pakistan’s “search for stability” has involved building relations with great powers like the United States and China to address its insecurities growing from asymmetry with India.⁴³ Additionally, Andrew Small emphasizes China’s historical and strategic importance to Pakistan, as it has emerged as a more dependable partner in light of reduced military and economic assistance from the United States.⁴⁴ These perspectives shed light on the complex dynamics that have influenced Pakistan’s quest for stability and its alignments with external powers.

Pakistan’s security dilemma has linkage with the Indo-U.S. collaboration and deepening of such partnership will exacerbate its challenges. Marukh argues that India’s close alliance with the United States in seeking strategic superiority in South Asia affects the region’s security as it disturbs regional security equilibrium.⁴⁵ Likewise, Fani maintains that transfer of advanced defense technology to India by the United States against China with the intention of creating a power imbalance in India’s favor, particularly concerning its relations with Pakistan—forcing Pakistan to make similar choices and

⁴⁰ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 132; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 168; Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 25–26.

⁴¹ Sangit Sarita Dwivedi, “Alliances in International Relations Theory,” *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* 1, no. 8 (August 2012): 25.

⁴² Timothy R. Heath, “U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry: Great Power Competition in the Post-Industrial Age,” in *New Asian Disorder: Rivalries Embroiling the Pacific Century*, ed. Lowell Dittmer, 1st ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022), 141–164.

⁴³ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2012), 4.

⁴⁴ Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–7.

⁴⁵ Khan, “U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 59–66.

leading region into arms race.⁴⁶ Bukhari also supports the idea of advanced defense technology transfer to prompt Pakistan for similar arrangement with China.⁴⁷ Amin and Qiaorui echoes the Indo-U.S. strategic collaboration to threaten security architecture of South Asia and force Pakistan to engage China to bridge defense asymmetry (i.e., with India).⁴⁸ The strategic imbalance in South Asia resulting from the India-centered policy of the United States has intensified “India’s assertiveness and Pakistan’s security concerns.”⁴⁹

Finally, Feroz Hassan Khan describes India and Pakistan as a hostage to “stubborn fixation,” which caused a drift in their relations and “represents the crux of the whole security dilemma” in South Asia—India “seeking its place in the sun” and Pakistan “seeking parity.”⁵⁰ Stephen Cohen describes the India-Pakistan conflict as a “paired minority conflict” fomented by a “strong-weak identity,” leading to a classic security dilemma.⁵¹ Khan identifies entrenched India-Pakistan rivalry at the domestic and system level stimulating security competition in South Asia—cognitive biases, organizational pathologies, and domestic politics at the domestic level and adversarial coalitions of the United States and India on the one hand, and China and Pakistan on the other at the system level.⁵² Similar thoughts shared by Bukhari, which characterizes Indo-U.S. strategic relationship as increasing asymmetry between India and Pakistan, which stresses the security paradigm and might lead to lowering the nuclear threshold.⁵³

⁴⁶ Muhammad Ishaque Fani, “The Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership in Post 9/11: Implication for Pakistan,” *Pakistan Vision* 10, no. 2 (December 2009): 131–57.

⁴⁷ Syed Shahid Hussain Bukhari, “India–United States Strategic Partnership: Implications for Pakistan,” *Berkeley Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (January 2011): 5–22.

⁴⁸ Huma Amin and Dr Qiaorui, “Security of Pakistan under the Shadow of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership,” *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 8 (July 2021): 6503–6.

⁴⁹ Lou, “Geopolitical ‘Entanglements’ and the China-India-Pakistan Nuclear Trilemma,” 285.

⁵⁰ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, xi–xii.

⁵¹ Stephen P. Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Comundrum* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 198.

⁵² Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift*, 36.

⁵³ Bukhari, *Pakistan’s Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 208.

While these sources and scholars identify and fairly explain GPC and the Indo-U.S. collaboration, however, a gap resides in identifying its implications on Pakistan, especially to its security calculus and identifying plausible policy options for Pakistan to resolve this security dilemma. This thesis intends to contribute an effort toward bridging this gap.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Pakistan's strategic location and its proximity to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy make it a significant player in the evolving dynamics of GPC in the region. The collaboration between India and the United States, characterized by a strategic partnership, has significant effects on the balance of power between India and Pakistan, tilting it in India's favor. This shift in power dynamics, marked by an imbalance, poses significant risks to Pakistan's security. Consequently, Pakistan may be compelled to consider alternative policies to countering the adverse consequences of this transformation. The thesis identifies three potential hypotheses on implications for Pakistan, however, in each of hypothesis undertaking internal balancing to address its economic and security challenges is rider-clause:

Hypothesis #1 Engagement with the United States: Pakistan may opt for deeper engagement with the United States to address the security dilemma while soft-pedaling its partnership with China. This could involve active dialogue, negotiation, and building mutual trust to allay concerns, clarify positions, and seek assurances regarding Pakistan's security interests.

Hypothesis #2 Strategic Alignment with China: Pakistan may choose to deepen its strategic alignment with China in response to the enhanced Indo-U.S. defense partnership. This could involve distancing from the United States and strengthening its political, economic, and military ties with China and leveraging Chinese support to balance the perceived threat from India.

Hypothesis #3 Diversification of Partnerships: Pakistan may focus on diversification of its relations with great powers by maintaining equidistance from all and reduce dependence on any single power. This could involve exploring diverse partnerships with all major powers to mitigate the security dilemma.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

A matrix of rising China pursuing “China’s Dream” to compete the established United States for global hegemon at one end and concurrent competition between emerging India and rising China for regional hegemon in the same geographic construct complicates the geopolitical landscape and requires qualitative research methods to gather in-depth insights from policymakers, scholars, and experts. The thesis incorporates theoretical frameworks and concepts on balance of power and power transitions which are germane to security dilemma and connects them at regional level in the context of GPC to provide a comprehensive analytical framework.

This thesis is centered on such core issues as border disputes, regional geopolitics, and security alliances. In addition, the study analyzes primary and secondary data to identify Pakistan’s key security concerns, perceptions, and strategic choices in response to enhancing the strategic partnerships between the United States and India. The study also identifies and assesses how the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership under the banner of Indo-Pacific Strategy to contain China has disturbed the strategic stability between India and Pakistan and exacerbated the security dilemma for Pakistan.

The thesis also recognizes the significant role that Russia plays in the context of South Asia, and its impact on policies and strategies of the United States, China, India, and Pakistan; however, analyzing these dynamics merit another study and is beyond scope of this thesis.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW AND DRAFT CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study has been structured into four chapters. The study begins with examining China’s Grand Strategy or “China Dream” that has resulted in intensifying GPC with the United States, reviews the entangled construct of South Asia regional order (especially divergent strategic thoughts of China and India on regional order), and explains how GPC at system level (China-U.S.) transits and plays out at regional chessboard by the United States capitalizing on the Sino-Indian rivalry. The later part of chapter also provides insight into how China’s enhanced influence in South Asia, especially through BRI, raises concerns for India and the United States and converges their interests vis-à-vis China.

Having identified the significance and relevance of China and the Sino-Indian rivalry, Chapter III reviews the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States to outcompete China, analyses partners and allies' perspective on subject strategy, especially of India, explores defense and security cooperation under the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, and highlights how it enables India to modernize its armed forces, makes it a regional hegemon, and assigns the role of Net Security Provider (NSP).

Chapter IV outlines the taxonomy of Pakistan's security dilemma driven by its threat perception of India, New Delhi's desire to undo partition, and the aggressiveness which Islamabad confronts from India. Moreover, it highlights that how Pakistan in the past has interacted with great powers to shore up its security apprehensions about India and how its all-time low relations with the United States challenge its security dilemma. Subsequently, the chapter covers implications of intensifying GPC on policy choices for Pakistan and explores repercussions of the substantial elevation of India's posture at global and regional level by the United States along with provision and support of sophisticated high-end military equipment. The chapter provides insight into transformation of India's strategic outlook to a state that is more assertive, confrontationist, and hardened on its disputes with other countries as result of the deepening of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. It investigates the growing asymmetry in military capabilities, which will compel Pakistan to explore policy choices to address its imbalance. In Chapter V, the study summarizes overall findings and concludes by suggesting broader roadmap for Pakistan to address its security dilemma.

II. THE DRAGON’S REACH: UNVEILING CHINA DREAM

The foundational step in comprehending Pakistan’s security dilemma lies in understanding the structural issues within the region—China’s evolving regional strategies to dominate India and assertive global aspirations to contest the United States implicate Pakistan’s strategic landscape. The rise of China and expression of the “China Dream” under President Xi Jinping have significantly reshaped its domestic and foreign policies. The Dream outlines China’s aspirations of becoming a global power and emphasizes its pursuit of comprehensive national rejuvenation in political, economic, social, and military spheres. Under Xi’s leadership, China has put into effect a range of policies and initiatives aimed at bolstering its global influence and countering the dominant position of the United States. Policies of reassurance, reforms, and resistance capture Xi’s China Dream to achieve sovereignty, enhance security, and project economic development.⁵⁴ The policy confronts Biden’s approach of competitive, collaborative, and adversarial relations with China under the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy—accompanied by mantra of invest, align, and compete.⁵⁵

In the South Asian context, China Dream seeks to recast South Asia in its image and unveiled plans to integrate it into China’s economic and strategic calculation.⁵⁶ China Dream describes South Asia as a “promising subcontinent with immense potential.”⁵⁷ Within the region, the Sino-India rivalry under umbrella of GPC reflects the hardening of their respective stances on border disputes, intensifying geopolitical rivalry, contesting for status as regional hegemon and dominance in the Indian Ocean Region, enveloping

⁵⁴ Avery Goldstein, “China’s Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance,” *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020): 164–201.

⁵⁵ Han Yong Hong, “Biden’s Impressive ‘Three-in-One’ Policy to Deal with China,” trans. Grace Chong, *Think China*, April 16, 2021, <http://www.thinkchina.sg/bidens-impressive-three-one-policy-deal-china>

⁵⁶ Mohan Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals* (Boulder, CO: FirstForumPress, 2011), 2; Gulshan Sachdeva, “China’s Current South Asia Strategy,” in *China’s Grand Strategy*, ed. David B. H. Denoon (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 147–48, <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479804085.003.0007>.

⁵⁷ Sachdeva, “China’s Current South Asia Strategy,” 148.

neighbors through their economies, competing for energy resources, along with cooperating in multilateral fora.⁵⁸ Moreover, China’s main apprehension of the increasing Indo-U.S. relations directly confronts India’s concern over China’s efforts to advance its influence in South Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁵⁹ It reinforces the “rediscovery of the strategic status of South Asia” in China’s perspective and presents prospects for China to reconfigure its economy, enhance its industrial capabilities, and further its “going global” strategy.⁶⁰ Moreover, the rise of two Asian giants in the same neighborhood at the same time with their overlapping spheres of influence adds another layer to already existing frigid relations between China and India.⁶¹

This chapter explores the dynamics of GPC, focusing on China’s policies and strategies particularly in South Asia. By examining China’s objectives, initiatives, and engagements in South Asia under the China Dream and prospects of Sino-India relations based on their strategic thinking about each other, this chapter highlights how rejuvenated China, with its focus on expanding influence and power projection, impacts strategic stability of South Asia. It creates a dynamic in which neighboring and regional states, notably India, perceive the increasing prominence of China as a potential threat to New Delhi’s security and interests, triggering such actions and reactions as strategic defense partnership with the United States, signing enabling agreements to enhance operational awareness and operability, building maritime capacity, modernizing armed forces through purchase of high-end military inventory, and developing defense domestic industrial base—these dynamics are among the most prominent forces in Pakistan’s neighbourhood and therefore critical context for its changing security dilemma.

⁵⁸ Malik, *China and India*, 1, 28, 35–37.

⁵⁹ C. Raja Mohan and Hernaikh Singh, eds., *Coping with China-India Rivalry: South Asian Dilemmas* (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2023), 93.

⁶⁰ Sanjeev Kumar, “China’s South Asia Policy in the ‘New Era’,” *India Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2019): 138, 141.

⁶¹ Malik, *China and India*, 32–33.

A. GPC: NAVIGATING CHINA DREAM

This section connects Chinese strategic thinking with Xi’s assertive policies, identifies causative factors for such awakening by China, and bridges the gap of how its desires to shape South Asia fuses with its global ambitions under GPC.

1. Coalescing Grand Strategy: Insights from Past

China’s rise presents a structural challenge in the ambit of GPC to all major U.S. national interests and confirms “Grand Strategy” is in play by China. Mohan identifies the fundamental components of China’s grand strategy on its path to great power: acquiring “comprehensive national power” as a crucial factor for achieving the position a global great power by 2049; sustaining China’s economic expansion through foreign resources, goods, and technology; pursuing military modernization, multilateralism, and multipolarity; and establishing a network of friendly nations and partners for China via the practice of soft power diplomacy and economic interdependence.⁶² The components of China’s grand strategy encompass a range of areas, including trade, providing development aid, focusing on manufacturing, undertaking defense and military expansion, and implementing an enhanced foreign policy and robust diplomacy to interact with the international community proactively.⁶³ In a nutshell, China aims to shape its desired outcomes and exert its influence on the global stage.

China’s shift away from international isolation find their roots in the reforms launched since 1978, with Deng Xiaoping prioritizing economic development and pursuing a low-profile foreign policy approach. Deng deviated from the “Great Leap Forward” and “Cultural Revolution” by focusing on economic development to bring China from isolation to rehabilitation.⁶⁴ Deng’s 24 ideograms of “*observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low*

⁶² Malik, 371.

⁶³ Jean Kachiga, *The Pulse of China’s Grand Strategy* (London: Routledge, 2022), 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003254867>.

⁶⁴ David M. Malone and Rohan Mukherjee, ‘India and China: Conflict and Cooperation’, *Survival* 52, no. 1 (2010): 142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396331003612513>.

profile, and never claim leadership” best reflect change in China’s foreign policy.⁶⁵ Jiang Zemin capitalized on earlier initiatives and advocated a “going out” policy by opening China’s door to foreign investment, undertaking educational and cultural exchanges, and expanding foreign trade.⁶⁶ This strategy reflected a delicate balancing act between maintaining ideological purity and pursuing pragmatic foreign policy objectives, as the country sought to navigate the complexities of a changing global order. Together these two strategies demonstrated China’s emphasis on economic development and further expansion of global engagement, indicating a nuanced approach to navigating the complexities of a changing global order while maintaining ideological consistency.

China has also introduced new phrases in foreign policy discourse to reflect its change in narrative from “keeping low profile” to “strive for achievement” through assertiveness.⁶⁷ Hu Jintao shaped China’s grand strategic thinking to secure its deserved place in the global affair by reflecting “peaceful rise and a promotion of harmonious world.”⁶⁸ Hu prioritized “sovereignty, security, and economic development” for reaching its greatness and improving its international status as a rising power.⁶⁹ Later, capitalizing on economic growth, Xi rejected ideas of low profile in world affairs by declaring a “new era” of an assertive and aggressive China to lead nearby Asian countries and the world.⁷⁰ This fundamental change in China’s approach reflected increased confidence and prominence. Xi’s insistence on “respect” for China’s “core interests” effectively demands other nations who were challenging China’s territorial claims to acknowledge and accept China’s asserted control over those disputed areas. Xi revised the old foreign policy mantra of 24 ideograms in March 2023, to drive China’s role in the foreseeable future under GPC:

⁶⁵ David L. Shambaugh, ed., *China & the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 46.

⁶⁶ Shambaugh, 13.

⁶⁷ Kachiga, *The Pulse of China’s Grand Strategy*, 179.

⁶⁸ Kachiga, 2–4.

⁶⁹ Kachiga, 3.

⁷⁰ Sutter, “Xi Jinping’s Vision of Chinese Foreign Policy,” 68.

“Be calm; keep determined; seek progress and stability; be proactive and achieve things; unite (under the banner of the party); and dare to fight.”⁷¹

The updated slogan aims to enhance China’s global influence and establish a multipolar world order where its interests are safeguarded. In this connection, China’s foreign policy under a “new era” of GPC advocates five main lines of effort: pursue mutual beneficial cooperation; uphold and advance economic globalization; develop global partnerships; support multilateralism; and reform global governance.⁷² It seeks to promote a combination of economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and soft power projection to shape international norms and institutions in alignment with its own goals and values.

2. China Dream: Forging the Path Forward

Themes of “national rejuvenation, moderately prosperous society, happiness, rule of law, and the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics” define the China Dream.⁷³ It was further explained in a joint press conference by Xi with President Obama in 2013 as “a dream of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, and it is closely linked to the dreams of the people of the world, including the United States.”⁷⁴ The imperative to “Make America Great Again” by President Trump to stop and contain China from gaining advantage was contested by Xi’s China Dream of the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” under a “strong Communist Party” to redeem the “Century of National Humiliation” by asserting itself more in world affairs to establish leadership of the international order.⁷⁵ Overall, the dream envisions China as a dominant power that draws

⁷¹ NDTV News Desk, “‘Be Calm; Keep Determined.’: Xi Jinping’s New Foreign Policy Mantra,” NDTV, March 10, 2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/chinese-president-xi-jinping-introduces-new-24-character-phrase-3849167>.

⁷² Timothy R. Heath, Derek Grossman, and Asha Clark, *China’s Quest for Global Primacy: An Analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), 53–56, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR-A447-1>.

⁷³ Yonit Manor-Percival, “The China Dream: Harmonious Dialectics and International Law,” in *Utopia and Modernity in China: Contradictions in Transition*, ed. David Margolies and Qing Cao (London: Pluto Press, 2022), 54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv28vb1x7.7>.

⁷⁴ Richard Madsen, “The American Dream and the China Dream,” in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 134–35.

⁷⁵ Madsen, 134–35; Heath, Grossman, and Clark, *China’s Quest for Global Primacy*, xv.

new alternate economic and security structure for Asia, in which it sees itself as a prosperous, peacefully reunified, respected and recognized great power.⁷⁶

Key tenets of the China Dream identified by Graham Allison include four main goals: to restore China’s predominant position in Asia; regain control over territories it perceives as “greater China” including Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; to regain influence in its neighboring regions and adjacent maritime areas to establish deterrence as expected of great powers; and command the respect of other major powers.⁷⁷ In addition, China has outlined “strategic end points” through specific targets and benchmarks to manifest the China Dream, which include a fully mechanized military by 2020, modernized by 2035, and world-class force by 2049 to “fight and win wars”; be an export manufacturer by 2025 through “Made in China 2025”; become a leader in science and technology by 2030; “a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence” by 2035; and acquire greatness and rejuvenation through superpower status by 2049.⁷⁸ Overall, it seeks to foster economic development, enhance military capabilities, and establish China as a global power.

China has pushed these milestones as central to a “community of common destiny for mankind” which include: keeping the Chinese Communist Party in power; maintaining and securing the unity of the motherland; transforming “China’s neighboring states into benign and ultimately compliant strategic partners;” ensuring control over China’s eastern maritime boundaries, extending to the second island chain, and pushing the presence of the United States out from Asia; safeguarding the stability of China’s broader continental periphery to the west by fostering a cooperative relationship with Russia, utilizing the BRI to extend strategic influence, and expanding economic and technological reach across Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and eventually Eastern and Western Europe;

⁷⁶ Malik, *China and India*, 92.

⁷⁷ Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

⁷⁸ Kachiga, *The Pulse of China’s Grand Strategy*, 4, 158–61; Atlantic Council, *The Longer Telegram: Toward A New American China Strategy* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2021)., 41–43.

and reshaping the global order to align it more closely with Chinese interests and values.⁷⁹ The concept of “a community with a shared future” also aims to encourage and facilitate international collaboration with China by challenging the world order led by the United States and aims at recognizing China’s global status.⁸⁰ Moreover, China stresses its identity as historically peaceful by describing itself as a traditionally benevolent Chinese empire based on righteous rule.⁸¹ It also desires a revision of the globalized governing structure to achieve eternal peace in the “harmonious world paradigm” by promoting “fluidity, flexibility, multiplicity, multipolarity, the reciprocity of ‘win-win’ cooperation, and the resolution of conflict through interaction and cultivated understanding.”⁸² The realization of the dream, within the context of GPC, depends on China’s ability to delicately navigate between advancing its own national interests while also considering and managing the apprehensions of other regional stakeholders, thus shaping potential dynamics of Indo-Pacific and global order at large.

3. China’s South Asian Chessboard: Interests and Policy Goals

For China, any policy for South Asia has transformed from continental policy to become “Indian Ocean policy” and the region as a “focal point in a global quest for energy security” through connectivity, port developments, and investments to secure alternate vital sea lanes.⁸³ Presently, all of the region is under the influence of China.⁸⁴ Though no official South Asia Strategy has ever been announced by China, its intentions are discernable from official declarations, speeches, and initiatives.

China regards South Asia as a new pole of growth, a crucial gateway to the Indian Ocean, serving as a significant maritime pathway for China’s trade and energy imports. The last decade or so witnessed a transition in the Chinese footprint in South Asia, as part

⁷⁹ Atlantic Council, *The Longer Telegram*, 30–43.

⁸⁰ Sutter, “Xi Jinping’s Vision of Chinese Foreign Policy,” 72.

⁸¹ Sutter, 74.

⁸² Manor-Percival, “The China Dream,” 55, 63.

⁸³ Jeff M. Smith, *Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 236.

⁸⁴ Shambaugh, *China & the World*, 270.

of its phenomenal expansion in comprehensive national power and geopolitical ambitions as a leading global power.⁸⁵ At the core of China’s approach to South Asia is BRI, a massive infrastructure and connectivity project, considered “a menacing grand strategy” and “a concerted strategic endeavors” by the United States and its allies “to gain foothold and displace” their influence in the region.”⁸⁶ It also serves to “socialize Asia” into China’s vision of global order, address the Malacca dilemma, leveraging “investments as influence projection,” and predatory financing on “debt-trap diplomacy” to further geostrategic goals by connecting the world to China.⁸⁷ This approach has resulted in China engaging in commercial exchanges as key investor in the majority of South Asian nations with their economic growth tied to China.⁸⁸ Moreover, the increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific as a political framework, coupled with growing strategic alignments between India and states like the United States, Australia, and Japan, has direct relation to expanding influence of China in South Asia.⁸⁹ The growing economic and strategic footprint of China has transformed South Asia into a crucial pole of growth, with immense potential and significant implications for the geopolitical landscape and solidifying China’s position as a leading global power.

China’s view Indo-U.S. collaboration as an alternative to proliferate regional rivalries and an effort by the United States to enable India to contest China’s territorial claims with India. China’s rapid military modernization, facilitated by political, diplomatic, and economic weights are also response to Indo-Pacific Strategy in security calculus of South Asia.⁹⁰ This strategic approach is motivated by several key policy objectives: first, claim the leadership role in South Asia by challenging the U.S. strategy of containment;

⁸⁵ Aparna Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2021), 243–44, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429054808>.

⁸⁶ Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein, eds., *After Engagement: Dilemmas in U.S.-China Security Relations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 330.

⁸⁷ deLisle and Goldstein, 332–36 BRI is a vision which is continuously expanding its reach. It constitutes six connectivity corridors involving 84 countries around the world to promote Chinese standards.

⁸⁸ Mohan and Singh, *Coping with China-India Rivalry*, v.

⁸⁹ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 242.

⁹⁰ Mohan and Singh, *Coping with China-India Rivalry*, v.

second, capitalize on China’s influence from sustained economic development, and achieve regional integration through such projects and investments as BRI; third, resolve core interests of territorial disputes with India; fourth, address the Malacca dilemma by securing vital sea lanes through which its trade and energy supplies pass—materializing agreements on port and harbor utilization with Indian Ocean littoral states; fifth, address challenges associated with separatist movements, religious extremism, and acts of terrorism having regional linkages; and lastly, deepen military cooperation to safeguard overseas investments, assets, and personnel, while also facilitating the export of arms and military technology.⁹¹

Overall, China’s commitment in South Asia is a component of its increasing outward-looking strategy to expand its arc of global presence and influence besides shaping the regional order to balance the dominance of India. Within the region, China wants to neutralize the deepening U.S. strategic relationship with India and its partnerships with other regional countries including Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal.⁹²

B. CHINA-INDIA PUZZLE: FRIENDS OR RIVALS

To understand GPC in the South Asian context, it is imperative to study frigid Sino-Indian relations, as it transformed the outlook of the region by providing a platform to enable both regional nations and global powers to pursue respective aspirations. The history of Sino-Indian relations is marked by a complicated interplay over border disputes, the war of 1962, issues on recognition of respective sovereignty, conflicting world views, and divergent geopolitical interests. Their relations are characterized by “asymmetry and imbalance” with China holding all material advantages.⁹³ Historically, Sino-Indian relations transformed from an initial period of peaceful coexistence in the 1950s to hostility and intense rivalry by the 1960s over territorial claims. Subsequently, the 21st century added new layers in Chinese relations with both countries vying for power, influence, and

⁹¹ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 236; Sachdeva, “China’s Current South Asia Strategy,” 147; Malik, *China and India*, 72.

⁹² Sachdeva, “China’s Current South Asia Strategy,” 148.

⁹³ Smith, *Cold Peace*, 217.

status in the same geographical region amid the GPC through forging partnerships with regional countries, building alliances with other powers, modernizing their military, enhancing economic relations with each other, and outreaching diplomatically to regional and great powers—locking existing frigid relations to “permanent structural rivalry.”⁹⁴ Policymakers describe their relations as the “central pivot of world politics” and “second most consequential bilateral relations,” which has global implications for determining security, governance, and prosperity.⁹⁵ Despite their entrenched differences, both states are engaged politically and economically in a zero-sum universe: cooperation and competition coexisting and advancing in tandem.⁹⁶

This section briefly discusses historical legacies of Sino-Indian relations by examining critical periods from independence until 1962 as well as the post-Cold War years—it has set the foundation for the present rivalry. Moreover, the period also elucidates the drivers of conflict, explains the countries’ respective strategic thoughts about each other, and draws a linkage of the Sino-Indian rivalry to present GPC, and how growing asymmetry in capabilities among these two Asian giants along with China’s proactive and assertive behavior in South Asia is forcing Indo-U.S. collaboration against China.

1. A Tale of Two Asian Giants

The spectrum of cooperation, mutual suspicion, conflict, distrust, rivalry, and containment best describes Sino-Indian relations from their genesis to-date. During the 1950s, the impact of Western imperialism, the rise of a bipolar world, and similar security concerns on both regional and global scales formed some of the underlying factors fostering harmony in Sino-Indian relations.⁹⁷ Both nations experienced a phase characterized by “euphoria and cordiality,” as they temporarily disregarded territorial disputes and aspired to a shared Sino-Indian leadership in Asia aimed at opposing Western

⁹⁴ Mohan and Singh, *Coping with China-India Rivalry*, 1–4.

⁹⁵ Rudolf G. Wagner, “China and India pre-1939,” in *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations*, ed. Kanti P. Bajpai, Selina Ho, and Manjari Chatterjee Miller (New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–2.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Cold Peace*, 225.

⁹⁷ Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 15.

influence.⁹⁸ Indian leaders like Nehru advocated aligning India’s strategic interests with China against the United States and backed China’s stance on the Taiwan matter.⁹⁹ Together, China and India fashioned “Panchsheel” as a guiding principle for their relations that highlight mutual acknowledgment of “territorial integrity and sovereignty,” a pledge to non-aggression, refraining from interference in respective internal matters, equality, and the advancement of “peaceful coexistence.”¹⁰⁰ Strong relations based on these principles also set the stage for their cooperation and unified stance that resulted in the emergence of India’s Non-aligned Movement (NAM).

However, subsequent events failed to capitalize on happy years of *Hindi chini bhai bhai* (India China as brothers) and witnessed their pursuance of policies contrary to principles of peaceful co-existence agreed on earlier. Between 1956 and 1962, the relationship between China and India unraveled from cooperation to rivalry and to war, primarily driven by their competition for regional dominance and motivated by territorial sovereignty over Aksai Chin, Tibet, Tawang, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. Nehru attempted to reassert India’s territorial claims to prevent Chinese advancement through the “Non-negotiation and Non-Recognition Policy” on China’s claims, formation of the Dalai Lama’s government to assert its claims over Tibet, rejection of swapping disputed lands between China and India as proposed by Zhou Enlai, and adoption of the “Forward Policy” to undertake military buildup in border regions.¹⁰¹ These policies backfired when China’s military response decimated Indian forces and led to a shameful defeat in 1962—China became the main nemesis of India after Pakistan.¹⁰² The period demonstrated China’s military superiority, left India humiliated, and threatened from the west by Pakistan with

⁹⁸ Malik, *China and India*, 29–30.

⁹⁹ Xuecheng Liu, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 5.

¹⁰⁰ Gillian Hui Lynn Goh, “China and India: Towards Greater Cooperation and Exchange,” *China: An International Journal* 4, no. 2 (September 2006): 266, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chn.2006.0013>.

¹⁰¹ Mohan and Singh, *Coping with China-India Rivalry*, 108; Liu, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations*, 31.

¹⁰² Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 59–61 Historically, both China and India have yet to reach understanding on length of their shared border with overlaying claims over areas along this border; Chinese claim of 3380 kilometres as against Indian description of 4057 kilometres.

assertive China to its north. Distaste for India can be traced back to a poem by Mao in 1974 by describing “India as a cow” or Zhou’s iteration of India as a “satellite state with imperial ambitions.”¹⁰³

“Five Nos” guided Sino-Indian rapprochement in September 1993, which led to signing of the “Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement.”¹⁰⁴ The resulting agreement was a notable advancement in their complex relationship by preserving the existing state of affairs while awaiting a peaceful and definitive border resolution, and reducing military forces.¹⁰⁵ The process of rebuilding relations continued into the start of the 21st century with “bilateral exchanges at political, economic, military, and cultural level” and culminated in the “Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity” agreement.¹⁰⁶ As a result of these agreements, India reiterated the acknowledgment of Tibet to be an integral part of China, while China agreed over Sikkim to be part of India.¹⁰⁷

However, over the last decade or so both states again have developed strained relations on divergent issues—from continental border disputes, increased contestation in the maritime domain, apprehensions of India regarding BRI as a geopolitical tool, rapid military modernization by China and its logistical network projects in disputed areas, along with lack of transparency from China on its activities in the disputed regions.¹⁰⁸ Such differences are evident in terms of surge of border skirmishes mainly in Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014), Dokhlam Standoff (2017), Galwan Valley (2020), and Pangong Lake Skirmish (2020).

¹⁰³ Malik, *China and India*, 74–75.

¹⁰⁴ Malik, 37–42 Five Nos included: don’t peddle the “China threat theory”; don’t support Tibet or Taiwan independence; don’t oppose the Sino-Pakistani “all weather relationship” or Sino-Burmese special relationship; don’t align with the United States to contain China; and don’t see or project India as an equal of China.

¹⁰⁵ Malik, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Malik, 87–88.

¹⁰⁷ Mansingh, Surjit, “Rising China and Emergent India in the 21st Century: Friends or Rivals?,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 19 no. 4, (2007): 117–119, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163270709464152>.

¹⁰⁸ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 269.

Present drivers of conflict in Sino-Indian relations reside in competing interests at regional and global levels encompassing ideological, geopolitical, and institutional considerations—their entrenched positions in the international system compound existing frigid relations. Ideological differences engendering rivalry include China’s belief in itself as the Middle Kingdom, characterized by a perspective that does not view other entities as equals; historical “tribute systems” of “Concentric Circles” model of China as opposed to the Indian “Mandala System” to govern foreign relations; emphasis by both on their centrality to the region; and divergent domestic political systems.¹⁰⁹ In addition, territorial disputes and infringing each other’s sovereignty, Indo-U.S. strategic partnership under Indo-Pacific Strategy to contain China, the United States to enable India militarily through Major Defense Partnership to confront China, Indian role of Net Security Provider (NSP) in South Asia, deepening ties of India with the Quad, China’s military alliance with Pakistan, economic and resource competition, and encroachment efforts by China and India in their respective “sphere of influence” are geopolitical considerations impacting complex dynamics of Sino-Indian relations.¹¹⁰ Further are institutional factors of rivalry to deny India a global power status by China, accepting India as its peer competitor, and marginalizing India’s representation at international institutions through blocking India’s attempt for a “permanent seat on the United Nation Security Council (UNSC)” and membership of Nuclear Supply Group (NSG).¹¹¹

2. India: The Elephant in China’s Strategic Room

India holds unique significance in China’s strategic thinking. Their relations affect the Chinese approach to “major powers, the neighborhood, the developing world, and

¹⁰⁹ Malik, *China and India*, 19–25.

¹¹⁰ Malik, 45–47; Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, “India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad,” *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 182–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470773>; Shveta Dhaliwal, *Indo-U.S. Relations: Steering through the Changing World Order* (London: Routledge India, 2021), 10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003093466>; White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 13, 16.

¹¹¹ Rajeswari Rajagopalan and Arka Biswas, “India–China Relations under Xi Jinping: An Indian Perspective,” *China: An International Journal* 15, no. 1 (February 2017): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chn.2017.0007>; Malik, *China and India*, 45–55, 155–65.

global governance.”¹¹² China under Xi has exhibited all forms of China’s earlier identification as India’s friend, neighbor, rival, and partner. He described the two countries as “long-term strategic cooperation partner,” emerging economies, forces in the multi-polarization process of the world, and both in the process of “national rejuvenation.”¹¹³ At the same time, India believes that Beijing’s India strategy incorporates encirclement, envelopment, and entanglement as comprehensive Chinese strategy, often referred to as “Chinese Checkers 2.0,” designed to obstruct India’s path to becoming a regional hegemon by disrupting its peaceful environment.¹¹⁴ Strands of encirclement pivot around China’s strategic presence in states bordering the Indian Ocean and keeping territorial disputes alive. Envelopment efforts focus on China’s strategic and economic expansion in South Asia, achieved through alliances, military expansion, trade partnerships, arms sales, and the establishment of military bases.¹¹⁵ Entanglement to manipulate India’s domestic ethnic-cum-religious issues to keep it involved with security issues. These efforts have a significant impact on regional dynamics, posing challenges for India’s security and geopolitical interests in the process.

Additionally, China acknowledges India’s place in the region’s “natural hierarchy” stands several rungs below China, and it wants India to adjust its policies accordingly.¹¹⁶ Overall, China desires that India stop aspiring to great power status; stop challenging and threatening its geostrategic interest and influence; end attempts to balance and act as a counterweight by forging alliances under the Indo-Pacific strategy; resolve territorial disputes and give up hegemonic aspiration; stop harboring the Dalai Lama and its Government in Exile; stop laying claim to Aksai Chin; stop propagating negativity about BRI; and stop enforcing trade protectionist policies.¹¹⁷ China expects India to assume a positive and constructive role in fostering regional stability, promoting economic

¹¹² Wagner, “China and India pre-1939,” 139.

¹¹³ Wagner, 143.

¹¹⁴ Malik, *China and India*, 108.

¹¹⁵ Malik, *China and India*, 1, 108.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Cold Peace*, 219.

¹¹⁷ Malik, *China and India*, 108–10; Smith, *Cold Peace*, 219–20.

cooperation, and hopes for a pragmatic and balanced approach from India in managing their bilateral relations and resolving contentious issues.

3. China: The Dragon at India's Strategic Gate

India considers China a significant regional and global power that has a profound impact on its strategic environment. India exhibits concerns over China's efforts to create a new Asian order with "Chinese primacy at its heart."¹¹⁸ Historically, India viewed itself as "hegemon in the immediate neighborhood" and "only security manager in South Asia" with countries in the region as part of its "civilizational sphere of influence"—now being challenged with the Chia's rise.¹¹⁹ India recognizes China's economic capabilities, military modernization, and its assertive behavior as a permanent threat to its territorial sovereignty and dominance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)—considered as its backyard. Moreover, perceptions about China which it considers in India's strategic thinking are likely to be a key determinant of its strategic partnership with the United States.

The evolving perceptions of strategic elites in India regarding China's regional engagements have steered a shift in India's strategy. Strategic elites in India construe China's deepening links with South Asian countries as China's "string of pearls policy" to "encircle India."¹²⁰ Moreover, India holds serious concerns over China's close relations with Pakistan, which holds economic, military, and nuclear, dimensions.¹²¹ Mohan places India and China as rivals who are locked in a constant security dilemma making Indian interests align more with the United States.¹²² Thus, India's strategy toward China has

¹¹⁸ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Pande, 2–3.

¹²⁰ Ashely J. Tellis, and Sean Mirski, eds. *Crux of Asia: China, India, and the Emerging Global Order*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for Global Peace, 2013, 130, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/crux_of_asia.pdf; Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 8–9.

¹²¹ Tellis and Mirski, *Crux of Asia*, 129.

¹²² C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wpjb4>. Mohan defines security dilemma as "each state perceives the actions, even defensive ones, of the other as threatening . . . a relentless escalation of tensions" ensues. For more on the concept of the "security dilemma," see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 3536.

transitioned initially from internal balancing with emphasis on border disputes to one of the combination of external balancing and hard balancing.¹²³

India's China policy has evolved with Modi in power. Significant steps taken during Modi's administration include an assertive response against China along the border especially after the Doklam and Galwan crisis; balancing by aligning and signing strategic partnership with the United States; deepening security collaboration with partners who share similar principles to include the United States, Australia, and France; undertaking rapid military modernization; raising barriers over trade and investment with China; boycotting the BRI; criticizing Beijing's approach to freedom of navigation; banning use of Chinese technology in India; improving relations and increasing assistance with small neighbors through "Neighborhood First Policy"; formulating new regional cooperation institutes with India at its center; rebranding the "Act East Policy" and a new push through Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) to forge partnerships in the region; increasing its deployment in IOR; and building maritime domain awareness.¹²⁴

The potential trajectory of Sino-India relations will be contingent upon how respective expectations are addressed and whether both countries can navigate their divergences to foster a cooperative and stable regional order. As both countries seek to assert their influence, tensions and competition are likely to persist, potentially leading to further challenges and complexities in their bilateral relations. However, the intense regional rivalry and competition for dominance create an uncertain path ahead, where strategic calculations, evolving alliances, and shifting power dynamics will influence the potential path of Sino-India relations.

C. CONCLUSION

The security calculus of South Asia is further influenced by China's expanding economic and military footprint, creating a complex regional environment. Moreover, the

¹²³ Manjeet S. Pardesi, "India's Conventional Military Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of India's National Security*, ed. Sumit Ganguly, Nicolas Blarel, and Manjeet S. Pardesi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–30.

¹²⁴ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 23–31.

pursuit of the China Dream has implications for China's relations with India, as both countries jostle for influence and navigate their differences. The unresolved border dispute, China's growing confidence in South Asia, and Sino-Indian competing geopolitical aspirations have heightened their respective security dilemmas. Their security concerns arise from the fear and mistrust each country harbors about the other's intentions, leading to a spiral of arms races, strategic posturing, and an increased risk of miscalculations, and deepening of alliance formation by India with the United States and partners to bridge its asymmetry with China. As both countries seek to safeguard their national interests and maintain regional stability, their intensive rivalry stretching from disputes over territorial disputes to influence in maritime domain including their geopolitical ambitions and partnerships, are likely to affect efforts to engage in sustained dialogue, confidence-building measures, and cooperative initiatives to address their differences and mitigate key differences.

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III. THE U.S. INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

As a central concept in U.S. strategic competition with China, the Indo-Pacific Strategy represents a pivotal shift in America’s foreign policy focus, signaling the region’s centrality to U.S. interests.¹²⁵ With an emphasis on maritime security, economic development, and regional cooperation, the Indo-Pacific Strategy has come into prominence as a dynamic framework in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century—it seeks to manage China’s ascendance and mounting influence across economic, diplomatic, military, and technological domains by acknowledging the interdependence between developments in the IOR and the Pacific Ocean.¹²⁶

As the Indo-Pacific Strategy influence expands, this chapter places its particular emphasis on South Asia, a region of strategic significance and complex challenges, that finds itself at the nexus of this transformative agenda. The region, home to diverse nations with varying strategic interests, is experiencing a complex interaction of great powers in security dynamics, economic aspirations, and political alignments. Moreover, the partnership between the United States and India, two of the world’s most important democracies, under Indo-Pacific Strategy has been steadily gaining traction in recent times, signifying a strategic partnership with far-reaching global and regional implications. This partnership has significantly impacted the strategic stability of South Asia and tilted balance of power between India and Pakistan in the former’s favor—it supports India’s continued rise and regional role as leader by building “Major Defense Partnership” and enables it as an NSP.¹²⁷ This chapter unpacks the U.S. policy objectives driving the Indo-Pacific Strategy, India’s role in the Indo-Pacific, the perspectives of allies and partners on Indo-Pacific Strategy, and highlights significance of growing Indo-U.S. collaboration in defense and security for India’s military modernization.

¹²⁵ Harsh V. Pant and Anant Singh Mann, *Understanding America’s Enduring Interest in the Indo-Pacific* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2023), <https://www.orfonline.org/research/understanding-americas-enduring-interest-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

¹²⁶ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 5.

¹²⁷ White House, 7, 13, 16.

A. A POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC DRIVE

This section sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the Indo-Pacific Strategy by examining the historical foundations, geopolitical imperatives, and power dynamics that have propelled this strategy to the forefront of international relations. It also draws on the U.S. partners' and allies' perspectives on the Indo-Pacific Strategy especially of India.

1. A Consequential Geostrategic, Geopolitical, and Geoeconomic Region

The Indo-Pacific region has evolved into a form of “geopolitical nomenclature” and a central hub of global economic, military, and diplomatic activities, which can potentially affect questions of war and peace.¹²⁸ This realization prompted the U.S. redefinition and expansion of its regional strategic framework from “Asia-Pacific,” with a primary emphasis on the Pacific Ocean and the states situated along its coasts, transforming it into what is currently recognized as the Indo-Pacific.¹²⁹

The strategic vitality of the Indo-Pacific Region, predominantly a maritime expanse, is rooted in its significant benchmarks: it encompasses 44% of the world's surface area; is home to 65% of the global population; contributes to 62% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP); includes 10 of the 20 fastest-growing economies; facilitates 46% of the world's merchandise trade.; and holds 87% of the next billion entrants into the middleclass.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the region hosts nearly three billion people with three of the four major world's economies, having combined GDP of almost \$20 trillion.¹³¹

Similarly, the destiny of the Indian Ocean is now perceived as closely intertwined with the fate of the Pacific Ocean.¹³² Robert Kaplan proposed that

¹²⁸ John Hemmings, *Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific* (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2018), 17, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Global-Britain-in-the-Indo-Pacific-WEB.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Heiduk and Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges*, 7.

¹³⁰ Phil Davidson, “Introduction to Indo-Pacific Security Challenges,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 3.

¹³¹ Satish Chandra and Baladas Ghoshal, eds., *The Indo-Pacific Axis: Peace and Prosperity or Conflict?* (London: Routledge, 2018), 23.

¹³² Chandra and Ghoshal, 34.

the Greater Indian Ocean region stretching eastward from the Horn of Africa past the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian plateau and the Indian subcontinent, all the way to the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, will be the center of global conflicts because most international business supply will be conducted through this route. Most important of all, it is in this region the interests and influence of India, China, and the United States are beginning to overlap and intersect. It is here the 21st century's global power dynamics will be revealed.¹³³

Thus, the IOR holds considerable prominence within the Indo-Pacific due to its advantageous geostrategic position, positioned at the junction of global commercial routes, connecting the primary engines of the international economy.

China's interests in the IOR reflect its multifaceted regional and strategic pursuits, ranging from securing vital sea lanes for trade and energy supplies to expanding its strategic footprint and influence, all while navigating the complex geopolitics of the region. The IOR also holds a strategic place in China's "two oceans" strategy for ensuring its maritime security and is the arena of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)'s expanded focus from "offshore waters defense" to "open seas protection."¹³⁴ Due to the increasing influence of China in the region, Kaplan notes that the Indian Ocean has become the juncture where "the rivalry between the United States and China in the Pacific [now] interlocks with the regional rivalry between China and India."¹³⁵ Previously, the Indian Ocean had a less significant role in the foreign policy priorities of the United States, mainly due to decreased reliance on energy imports from the Persian Gulf. However, the current United States administration has adopted an India-centric IOR strategy to position India as a regional counterweight to counteract the expansion of China.¹³⁶ The intensifying competition, particularly in South Asia, has engendered a palpable security dilemma, as regional nations, particularly India and Pakistan, grapple with balancing their strategic interests amid the shifting dynamics of these two major global players.

¹³³ Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010).

¹³⁴ Rushali Saha, "Prioritizing the Indian Ocean in U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," Stimson Centre, February 3, 2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/prioritizing-the-indian-ocean-in-us-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

¹³⁵ Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 9.

¹³⁶ Zaidi and Nirmal, "Regional Political Paradigm Shift," 785.

2. Tracing the Development of the Indo-Pacific Vision

The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States has undergone evolution over the past decade, reflecting transformations in the geopolitical dynamics of the region and shifts in the foreign policy objectives of the United States. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy traces its origins to the concept introduced by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in August 2006 known as the Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP). Abe envisioned the Indo-Pacific region as a “single strategic entity,” under the leadership of a coalition comprised of “like-minded, pro-free trade democracies” with its central focus on the Quad, comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.¹³⁷ Later, in 2011, President Obama, drawing on Abe’s concept, announced a “Pivot to Asia” policy that sought to overcome a period of regional strategic atrophy by the United States to challenge drivers of the global disorder, insecurity, and instability by revisionist powers like China and Russia by strategically intertwining and connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, dubbed the “Indo-Pacific” region.¹³⁸ The policy change signaled a U.S. strategic shift toward the Indo-Pacific region.¹³⁹ In this connection, Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State, recognized a “strategic turn” to the region by highlighting vitality of an America engaged with Asia.¹⁴⁰ Other related significant developments prompting strategic realignment encompassed the increasing economic significance of the Asia-Pacific region, China’s expanding military capabilities and its assertive stance regarding contested maritime territories, the conclusion of military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the U.S. commitment to preserving an ‘open and rules-based system’ and the freedom of navigation.¹⁴¹ This overarching policy change was characterized by Washington as a “regionwide multidimensional policy

¹³⁷ Michael D. Swaine, “Creating an Unstable Asia: The U.S. ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Strategy,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/02/creating-unstable-asia-u.s.-free-and-open-indo-pacific-strategy-pub-75720>.

¹³⁸ David Scott, “The Indo-Pacific in U.S. Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts,” *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2018): 19–43.

¹³⁹ Rajesh M. Basrur, Anit Mukherjee, and T.V. Paul, eds., *India-China Maritime Competition: The Security Dilemma at Sea* (London: Routledge, 2019), 175.

¹⁴⁰ Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>.

¹⁴¹ Mark E. Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s “Rebalancing” toward Asia*, CRS Report No. R42448 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1.

initiative,” formulated to ready the United States for sustained political, economic, and military supremacy throughout the 21st century.¹⁴²

The Trump administration formally introduced the first-ever policy aimed at collectively countering China’s expanding influence and its assertive and aggressive conduct in Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean through its FOIP.¹⁴³ Within this policy, the United States pursued three primary strategic goals: the reinforcement and expansion of its alliance and partnership network in the region, the contestation of maritime claims that conflicted with international law, and the preservation of the balance of power through the extension of security collaborations.¹⁴⁴ The United States Indo-Pacific report, published in 2019, highlighted combining a more lethal joint force with system of alliances by means of the pursuit of “preparedness, partnerships, and the promotion of a networked region” to further and safeguard U.S. interests in that particular region.¹⁴⁵ The concept further envisaged investment to modernize key allies’ and partners’ defense capabilities while allocating more resources under the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development, or BUILD Act, to counter China.¹⁴⁶ Under the Trump administration, the FOIP strategy was primarily intended to tackle China’s economic and military ascent, aiming to assert regional dominance in the near future while establishing global supremacy over the long term.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, the Biden administration has expanded the Indo-Pacific discourse and highlighted the region’s future with respect to China and the world’s dependence on free and open regions; this administration regards the Indo-Pacific region as a principal policy

¹⁴² Robert G. Sutter et al., *Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Stability* (Washington, DC: Sigur Center for Asian Studies, 2013), 1–2, <https://www.risingpowersinitiative.org/publication/rpi-policy-report-balancing-acts-the-u-s-rebalance-and-asia-pacific-stability/>.

¹⁴³ Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019), 8, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

¹⁴⁴ Department of Defense, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Department of Defense, 3–5.

¹⁴⁶ Heiduk and Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific*, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Heiduk and Wacker, 14–17.

arena for its foreign and economic efforts to address a revisionist China.¹⁴⁸ To this end, the “Indo-Pacific Strategy,” issued in February 2022, reflects the resolve by the United States to anchor itself in the region and strengthen the region alongside its closest allies and partners through regional connectivity, deepening military engagements, trade and investment, and bilateral and multilateral partnerships.¹⁴⁹ The major objectives outlined in the policy include (1) promoting a free Indo-Pacific, (2) nurturing and enhancing connections both within the region and beyond, (3) driving regional economic growth, (4) enhancing security in the Indo-Pacific, and (5) reinforcing the region’s ability to withstand transnational challenges.¹⁵⁰ This strategy deviates from previous U.S. approaches to the region by placing a significant focus on collaboration with regional allies and partners, highlights plans for new trade initiatives that adhere to “higher labor and environmental standards,” and underscores the significance of enhanced collaboration between the United States and India as a key area of focus, alongside the expansion of the Quad partnership.¹⁵¹ The policy envisions a “latticework of alliances and partnerships’ involving deeper, overlapping ties” to counter China’s growing influence through a combination of economic, diplomatic, and security initiatives.¹⁵²

3. Partners’ and Allies’ Perspectives

U.S. partners and allies, including India, Japan, Australia, and Europe, have issued respective Indo-Pacific strategies under the overall construct with significant divergences, among other things on, a) geographical delineation of the region, b) objectives, c) emphasis

¹⁴⁸ Biden, National Security Strategy, 8, 37.

¹⁴⁹ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 4.

¹⁵⁰ White House, 7.

¹⁵¹ Carla Freeman, Daniel Markey, and Vikram J. Singh, “A Closer Look at Biden’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” United States Institute of Peace, March 7, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/closer-look-bidens-indo-pacific-strategy>.

¹⁵² James Crabtree, “Indo-Pacific Dilemmas: The Like-Minded and the Non-Aligned,” *Survival* 64, no. 6 (2022): 24–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2150423>.

on different policy fields, d) inclusion or exclusion of China in the strategy, and e) importance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches on key issues.¹⁵³

In consideration of geography, the United States identified Indo-Pacific region “from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States.”¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, when the United States not only rebranded the U.S. Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command but also incorporated the region to the west of India into the Central Command.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, Australia differs from the U.S. definition of Indo-Pacific region and identifies geographic stretch of the region in its White Paper as the area “from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, linked by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia, and the United States.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Japan, another key ally, also takes a different view from the U.S. definition of the region and identifies the Indo-Pacific in its policy as the region stretching from “the east coast of the African continent, including the eastern and western Indian Ocean, to the Pacific Ocean.”¹⁵⁷ The European Union’s definition of the region coincide with Japan’s and the specifies area that covers the expanse extending from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Islands States as Indo-Pacific.¹⁵⁸ Divergence on commonality in delineation of region has led to challenges in coordinating and implementing the strategy effectively, potentially resulting in a lack of unity and cohesive action against common challenges or threats in the region.

While all U.S. allies and partners cast their Indo-Pacific strategic visions in terms of deepening economic engagements and dense partnerships with India, they disagree with each other about the inclusion or exclusion of China. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy seeks

¹⁵³ Heiduk and Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges*, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 45–46, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Dhaliwal, *Indo-U.S. Relations*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Malcolm Turnbull, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Barton ACT: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017), 80.

¹⁵⁷ Roy-Chaudhury and de Estrada, “India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad,” 184.

¹⁵⁸ Girish Luthra, *An Assessment of the European Union’s Indo-Pacific Strategy* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2021), 3.

specifically “to challenge and contain the rise of China.”¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, the white paper of Australia advocates “strong and constructive ties with China.”¹⁶⁰ Conversely, the European Union’s (EU) new Indo-Pacific strategy demonstrates a deliberate aim to place the EU within the evolving global and regional governance systems, emphasizing strategic independence, inclusivity, adherence to the rules-based order, keenness to involve rather than exclude China from definition of the Indo-Pacific region, and deepening engagement with India.¹⁶¹ The Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) in its “Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” underlines the inclusive nature of the region without exception and discourages the military aspect of regional competition.¹⁶² Japan’s strategy, meanwhile, emphasizes securing economic prosperity, promoting rule-based order, and preserving peace and security by fostering enhanced collaboration, and avoids framing its strategy as “containment strategy vis-à-vis China.”¹⁶³

4. India in the Indo-Pacific

India occupies a pivotal position within the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, exemplifying the evolving dynamics of regional geopolitics. Indeed, the action plan of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy lists its vow to “support India’s continued rise and regional leadership” as core line of effort signifying India’s importance.¹⁶⁴ This policy recognizes “building strategic partnership” with “like-minded partner [India]” to collaborate in new domains and deepen economic and technology cooperation to manage China’s rise.¹⁶⁵ The policy further defines India as strategic means to pursue the strategic ends of FOIP.¹⁶⁶ In a public address, the former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, depicted an Indo-Pacific region upheld and safeguarded by two robust bastions of democracy—namely, the United

¹⁵⁹ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 6–16.

¹⁶⁰ Turnbull, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, 15.

¹⁶¹ Luthra, An Assessment of the European Union’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, 10–13.

¹⁶² Heiduk and Wacker, From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, 26–29.

¹⁶³ Heiduk and Wacker, 18–21.

¹⁶⁴ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 16.

¹⁶⁵ White House, 16.

¹⁶⁶ White House, 10.

States and India.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the U.S. NSS of 2022 also pronounces empowering India as a leader in South Asia and the IOR through “Major Defense Partnership,” building maritime capacity and awareness, linking both countries defense industrial base, developing joint efforts across warfighting domains and defense supply chains, and enhancing interoperability to enhance India’s overall military capability to counter China.¹⁶⁸ In addition, it imagines the United States aligning with regional allies and “supporting a strong India as a partner in this regional vision.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the U.S. policy oriented toward enabling India as counterweight to China in the region as its key partner—against India’s stance to remain non-aligned—resulted in the deepening of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, more in defense and security.

India anticipates broadening its diplomatic and political influence throughout the Indo-Pacific region; its principal area of interest remains leading regional security architecture, particularly on the western side of the Strait of Malacca. The IOR remains its strategic focus and holds an “influential place” where India intends to “lead a counter-order to China’s BRI.”¹⁷⁰ India’s stakes in the region stem from geopolitical aspirations to expand its presence in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, sustain its position as an NSP, and counter China’s strategic foothold in the region.¹⁷¹ Indian Prime Minister Modi presented India’s Indo-Pacific vision at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018, which prioritized intensified security cooperation with the United States and its allies over economics, oriented toward the status quo in great power status of the United States, and establishing a free, open, and inclusive region.¹⁷² Other key elements of India’s vision include: (1) Southeast Asia at the center of Indo Pacific; (2) common rules-based order for

¹⁶⁷ Alyssa Ayres, “Tillerson on India: Partners in a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific,’” *Asia Unbound* (blog), October 18, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/tillerson-india-partners-free-and-open-indo-pacific>.

¹⁶⁸ Biden, National Security Strategy, 12, 15, 38; White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 10.

¹⁶⁹ White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Roy-Chaudhury and de Estrada, “India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad,” 191.

¹⁷¹ Dhaliwal, Indo-U.S. Relations, 15–24.

¹⁷² Rajesh Rajagopalan, “Evasive Balancing: India’s Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 78–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz224>.

the region; (3) equal access to global commons in maritime and space, as a right under international law; and (4) circumventing power rivalries through partnerships.¹⁷³

India differs from the United States on the geographical extension of the Indo-Pacific region and considers the area to extend to the east coast of Africa, including both the eastern and western Indian Ocean.¹⁷⁴ Another divergence of India from the U.S. policy resides in the former's recognition of China's "inclusiveness" in the region, rebuffing Indo-Pacific Strategy as an "alliance formation" against any other country, and its prioritization of prominent military role in the Indian Ocean only.¹⁷⁵ The long-standing foundations of Indian foreign policy—nonalignment and strategic autonomy—significantly shape India's understanding and approach to the Indo-Pacific concept.¹⁷⁶ Geostrategically building Indian "maritime security order in the Indian Ocean" and remaining non-aligned and strategically autonomous in its relations with the United States remains Modi's policy objectives under the Indo-Pacific Strategy.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, Modi intends to maintain "maritime economic flow" and avoid confrontation with China as a key elements of India's Indo-Pacific Strategy.¹⁷⁸ Thus, Modi undertakes "pragmatic balancing" without "formally aligning with the United States or gesturing for any confrontational behavior against China."¹⁷⁹ This role of India flows from the decisive role of traditional Indian pillars of "non-alignment and strategic autonomy"

¹⁷³ Darshana M. Baruah, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/30/india-in-indo-pacific-new-delhi-s-theater-of-opportunity-pub-82205>; Hongsong Liu and Ahmed Bux Jamali, "India's Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Pragmatic Balancing between the United States and China," *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (April 2021): 7–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12178>; Roy-Chaudhury and de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad," 187–91; Nidhi Prasad, "India's Foray into the Indo-Pacific: Embracing Ambiguity through Strategic Autonomy" in *The Modi Administration and Future of India*, ed. T. Horimoto and H. Miwa (Chiba, Japan: IDE-JETRO, 2019), 129–31.

¹⁷⁴ Roy-Chaudhury and de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad," 184.

¹⁷⁵ Liu and Jamali, "India's Indo-Pacific Strategy," 9–10.

¹⁷⁶ Prasad, "India's Foray into the Indo-Pacific."

¹⁷⁷ Liu and Jamali, "India's Indo-Pacific Strategy," 5–7.

¹⁷⁸ Liu and Jamali, 5.

¹⁷⁹ Liu and Jamali, 5.

strengthened through partnership and delinking non-alignment from autonomy.¹⁸⁰ Rajagopalan identifies “evasive balancing” as India’s Indo-Pacific Strategy through “balancing” the United States and concurrently “reassuring” China.¹⁸¹

Overall, India’s strategy pivots on the idea of an “India-oriented” region and prevents “extensive competition” in the region.¹⁸² To this end, its Indo-Pacific Strategy emerged as a framework to uphold maritime security, promote economic prosperity, and strengthen diplomatic ties, effectively harnessing the synergy between India’s “Act East” policy and the U.S. strategic rebalance to Asia.¹⁸³ Moreover, India is competing with China’s Maritime Silk Road through the SAGAR initiative, Extended Neighborhood Policy, Act East Policy, and Sagarmela Program, which include spending approximately \$120 billion in port development, upgrading Coastal Employment Zones, laying pipelines, and constructing innovative super ports.¹⁸⁴ The present relationship between the United States and India imitate “the cold peace” and “comrades at odds,” with India playing a similar role as in the Cold War era by forming an alliance with the United States to balance security challenges from China.¹⁸⁵ However, historically, Indian leadership has been cautious about formalizing defense partnerships with the United States and have favored more ambiguous arrangements to prevent being perceived as a mere “pawn” or part of an American balancing strategy.¹⁸⁶

B. INDO-U.S. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The history of India-U.S. relations has been a complex tapestry, characterized by a blend of alignment and disagreement. In the early years following India’s independence in

¹⁸⁰ Nidhi Prasad, “India’s Foray into the Indo-Pacific,” 141–44.

¹⁸¹ Liu and Jamali, “India’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 6–7.

¹⁸² Liu and Jamali, 8.

¹⁸³ Chandra and Ghoshal, *The Indo-Pacific Axis*, 97–99, 101.

¹⁸⁴ Liu and Jamali, “India’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 27–28.

¹⁸⁵ Azeem Gul et al., “Assessing Various Opportunities and Challenges in India-U.S. Strategic Partnership,” *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues* 24, no. 1 (2021): 3–4.

¹⁸⁶ C. Raja Mohan, *Modi’s World: Expanding India’s Sphere of Influence* (Noida, India: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015), 212–17.

1947, the two nations shared a commitment to democratic values and policy of non-alignment.¹⁸⁷ However, during the Cold War, geopolitical orientations of India toward non-alignment led to divergence, as it maintained closer ties with communist blocs, especially with the Soviet Union, the principal adversary and competitor of the United States.¹⁸⁸ The end of the Cold War era witnessed a thaw in their relations that opened doors for enhanced engagement, driven by changing global dynamics, India's economic liberalization, and shared concerns about terrorism.¹⁸⁹

U.S. President Clinton's visit to India in 2000 set "new strategic orientation" in relations with India resulting in the signing of "Indo-U.S. Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century."¹⁹⁰ Defense partnership between both countries transformed with signing of General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002.¹⁹¹ The agreement allows to share sensitive military information and intelligence, emphasizes cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, promotes maritime security including information sharing on naval activities and movements in the Indian Ocean, and provides protection to classified information shared under GSOMIA.

Later, the Bush administration in 2004 deepened the strategic partnership with the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership agreement (NSSP) signed with India to expand cooperation in the field of civil nuclear energy, high-technology trade by removing trade barriers and restrictions, space exploration for joint space missions and satellite launches and missile defense.¹⁹² It laid the groundwork for the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement,

¹⁸⁷ Sumit Ganguly, Brian Shoup, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *U.S.-Indian Strategic Cooperation into the 21st Century: More than Words* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ashok Kapur, *Geopolitics and the Indo-Pacific Region* (London: Routledge, 2020), 11, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425615>.

¹⁸⁹ Sumit Ganguly, "The Evolution of American Foreign Policy Toward India," in *The Routledge Handbook of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific*, by Oliver Turner, Nicola Nymalm, and Wali Aslam (London: Routledge, 2022), 320–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003018322-26>.

¹⁹⁰ Balwinder Singh, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Relations in the 21st Century," *Journal of Political Studies*, June 30, 2018, 249.

¹⁹¹ Dhaliwal, Indo-U.S. Relations, 121.

¹⁹² Ganguly, Shoup, and Scobell, *U.S.-Indian Strategic Cooperation into the 21st Century*, 23.

also known as the 123 Agreement, which was signed in 2007.¹⁹³ This agreement provided India with access to civilian nuclear technology and fuel, marking a major shift in the U.S. approach to India's nuclear program from restricting India's nuclear development to providing requisite material and capability.¹⁹⁴ The agreement also transformed the relationship into a strategic partnership.¹⁹⁵ The deal also had economic dividend of the \$40 billion for the United States in form of its firms investing in power reactors.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, during same period, both countries signed "New Framework for the Indo-U.S. Defense Relationship" agreement in 2005 focused on joint-exercises, defense-trade and cooperation in naval security and counter-piracy collaborations.¹⁹⁷ The brief period witnessed defense sale of approximately \$8 billion, whereby the United States provided C-130J-30 Hercules Transport aircraft, C-17A Globe Master Transport aircraft, and P-8A Poseidon Anti Surface Warfare aircraft to India.¹⁹⁸ These agreements served to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two nations, creating opportunities for collaboration on various regional and global matters while further enhancing defense and security relations.

Significant policy change came in 2011, with Obama's "Pacific Pivot" that underpinned stability and security in Asia-Pacific by including South Asia in its geographical scope,¹⁹⁹ expanded U.S. military footprints in the region, labelled Asia as the primary naval theatre of operations, and forged a new partnership with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.²⁰⁰ President Obama termed U.S.-Indian security cooperation as "the

¹⁹³ Singh, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Relations in the 21st Century," 251.

¹⁹⁴ Jayshree Bajoria and Esther Pan, "The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal," Council on Foreign Relations, November 5, 2010, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-india-nuclear-deal>.

¹⁹⁵ Singh, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Relations in the 21st Century," 255.

¹⁹⁶ Robert O. Blake, Jr., *The Evolution of the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, June 7, 2012), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/191979.htm>.

¹⁹⁷ Singh, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Relations in the 21st Century," 251.

¹⁹⁸ K. Alan Kronstadt, *India-U.S. Security Relations: Current Engagement*, CRS Report No. R42823 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 3–17.

¹⁹⁹ Increasing strategic rivalry between China and India also serves to bring these Asian sub-regions into a larger Asia-wide strategic dynamic.

²⁰⁰ Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" toward Asia*, 3–4.

defining partnerships of the 21st century”—key areas of cooperation remained in maritime security, counterterrorism, defense trade, and armaments cooperation.²⁰¹ Overall policy proceeded along six priority areas of interests: (1) strengthening bilateral security alliances; (2) deepening America’s relationships with such emerging powers as China; (3) engaging with regional multilateral institutions; (4) expanding trade and investment; (5) forging a broad-based military presence; (6) and advancing democracy and human rights.²⁰² The U.S. policy continues to evolve to address emerging issues and opportunities in this strategically vital part of the world.

A central part of earlier U.S. administration’s effort was to strengthen the security capability and capacity of key “partner states”—most prominently, India—by providing more flexible security assistance, increasing training and joint exercises, and assistance in military technologies.²⁰³ The Obama administration boosted defense and security partnership with India by formalizing foundational enabling agreements to deepen defense and security ties. For example, the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) framework was launched in 2012 to promote defense cooperation between India and the United States, including collaboration on unmanned aerial vehicles, jet engine technology, and naval systems.²⁰⁴ In addition, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) signed in 2016 between India and the United States signaled shift in India’s defense policy from non-aligned to strategically aligned with the United States.²⁰⁵ It allowed greater synergy in military operations of both countries and enhanced operational reach of Indian Navy by facilitating logistic support for refueling, repair, and maintenance. The agreement has facilitated India to adopt a “multi-mission deployment of 12–15 naval ships” in the Indo-Pacific to monitor the choke points of IOR, guarantee the secure transit

²⁰¹ Barack Obama, “One of the Defining Partnerships of the 21st Century.” Outlook, February 3, 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/one-of-the-defining-partnerships-of-the-21st-century/267820>.

²⁰² Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century.”

²⁰³ Manyin et al., Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s “Rebalancing” toward Asia, 10–12.

²⁰⁴ Ganguly, “The Evolution of American Foreign Policy Toward India,” 325.

²⁰⁵ Dhaliwal, Indo-U.S. Relations, 23.

of trade, improve awareness of maritime domains, and counter non-traditional threats.²⁰⁶ India was also declared “Major Defense Partner,” which granted it the “same privileges as U.S. Treaty allies.”²⁰⁷

In the Trump era, the India-USA 2+2 dialogue was initiated as a critical mechanism for fostering strategic cooperation and security alignment, enhancing communication and coordination, promoting a more holistic understanding of bilateral and regional issues, and strengthening defense collaboration.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the United States accorded Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status to India in July 2018 signifying a high level of trust and cooperation facilitating sales of sensitive defense and high-technology items essential for India’s military modernization efforts and technological development.²⁰⁹ It also eased the transfer of space technology and defense equipment, contributing to India’s space exploration and defense capabilities.²¹⁰ Later, in 2018, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) further enhanced interoperability, improved situational awareness, contributed operational effectiveness, and eased access to India for advanced defense and cyber technology between both countries.²¹¹ Security and defense partnership further consolidated in 2020 with both countries signing the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)—a foundational defense pact to facilitate greater collaboration and information-sharing between the defense forces in geospatial intelligence, topographical, nautical, and aeronautical data, which was crucial for improving the accuracy of missile systems, navigation, and targeting.²¹² These agreements

²⁰⁶ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “India’s Military Outreach: Military Logistics Agreements,” *The Diplomat*, September 9, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/indias-military-outreach-military-logistics-agreements/>.

²⁰⁷ Dhaliwal, Indo-U.S. Relations, 19.

²⁰⁸ Ganguly, “The Evolution of American Foreign Policy Toward India,” 326.

²⁰⁹ Dhaliwal, Indo-U.S. Relations, 24.

²¹⁰ Bukhari, Pakistan’s Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership, 181.

²¹¹ Bukhari, 130, 207.

²¹² Riaz Ahmad and Azeem Gul, “Neo-Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Challenges for Pakistan,” *NDU Journal*, (2021): 19; Sufian Ullah and Zeeshan Hayat, “India as a Net Security Provider in Indo-Pacific and Implications for the Region,” *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* 4, no. 1 (2021): 33, <https://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v4i1.77>.

streamlined sales and exchange of high-end defense inventories to India and provided a platform to further strengthen Indo-U.S. defense and security arrangements to collaborate effectively in addressing common security challenges.

The United States has played a pivotal role in bolstering India’s military modernization efforts and “Made in India” program through the sale of defense articles and facilitating technology transfer, encouraging investments, and promoting collaboration—all of which contribute to strengthening India’s domestic defense manufacturing capabilities and self-reliance. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy enables India to advance “Major Defense Partnership steadily,” linking the defense industrial base and integrating the defense supply chain, thereby “build [ing] defense capacity” to modernize the armed forces, advance warfighting capabilities, and deepen interoperability to shore up collective military advantage and resilient force posture—“support role as a net security provider [NSP].”²¹³ Over the last decade, notable purchase of military acquisitions under Indo-U.S. collaboration include: (1) 12 x P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft for anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, and surveillance and reconnaissance (2) purchase of 11 x C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft for the Indian Airforce to rapidly and strategically deliver troops and all types of cargo; (3) deal for 39 x AH-64E Apache attack helicopters with 22 x Apache delivered while 6 x fuselage manufactured in India to be handed over by 2024; (3) transaction of 15 x CH-47F Chinook heavy-lift helicopters to Indian Airforce to bolster India’s aerial firepower and strategic airlift capabilities; (4) deal for acquisition of 31 x MQ-9B Sea-Guardian drones to be assembled and maintained in India with a focus on improving Intelligence, Reconnaissance, and Surveillance (ISR) systems and enhancing precision-attack capabilities; (5) purchase of 89 x M777 Ultra Lightweight Howitzers and co-production of 61 x remaining howitzers in India for deployment in conflict zone along northern and western border; (6) purchase of Integrated Air Defense Weapon System (IADWS) including the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS), to enhance India’s air defense capabilities; (7) procurement of 24 x Harpoon missile to increase India’s anti-surface warfare capabilities; and (8) inking of deal to jointly

²¹³ White House, 13.

manufacture jet engines under “Make in India” policy to reduce reliance on Russia.²¹⁴ This transformation in India’s defense capabilities, facilitated by U.S. defense agreements and sales, has not only elevated its military preparedness and capabilities, but has also contributed to strengthening the Indo-U.S. collective security posture in the Indian Ocean.

C. CONCLUSION

The synergy of interests between the United States and its Indo-Pacific partners, notably India, has redefined the contours of regional power dynamics especially in the IOR. Indo-U.S. collaboration within this framework has evolved and strengthened in defense and security cooperation to enable India as counterweight to China, a regional hegemon, and NSP. However, this collaboration is not devoid of challenges and complexities, including managing the divergent strategic postures of the United States and India toward China, navigating regional sensitivities on historical border disputes, working to resolve cascading security imbalance between Pakistan and India, addressing disturbed strategic stability and regional balance of power, and more importantly ensuring inclusive regional governance.

Intensification of Sino-Indian rivalry especially in the last decade coupled with the defense partnership of India with the United States and its allies under rubrics of Indo-Pacific Strategy, acquisition of latest military inventory by India, and energization of Quad to contain China’s rise has resulted in the imbalance of military competitiveness between Pakistan and India. China’s aspirations to outcompete the United States as global power and India’s aspiration to be regional hegemon with both undertaking rapid military modernization has compounded Pakistan’s security dilemmas. After having deliberated China’s connection especially in the regional dynamics earlier and reviewed Indo-Pacific Strategy in the current chapter, the stage is set to identify and analyze Pakistan’s security dilemma stemming from strategic alignment of the U.S. interests in the region with India and upgradation of its military capabilities.

²¹⁴ Bukhari, *Pakistan’s Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 116, 117, 126; Syed Rifaat Hussain, “Pakistan’s Quest for Security: An Historical Analysis,” *Strategic Thought*, no. 1 (2019): 39–44.

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IV. PAKISTAN'S SECURITY DILEMMA

In the complex and volatile landscape of South Asia, Pakistan, nestled in a region characterized by historic rivalries and enduring disputes, has long grappled with a multifaceted security dilemma. Pakistan's security dilemma arises from tense and progressively antagonistic relations with India over territorial disputes, which have grown under evolving Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. This collaboration has introduced a paradigm shift in the strategic dynamics of the region—empowering India to impact China Dream has raised profound implications for Pakistan's national security. Pakistan must safeguard its national interests, deter potential threats, and maintain regional stability. Historically, Pakistan's foreign and defense policy has been India's centered on the challenge of balancing, countering, and potentially confronting the threat posed by India—relying on external powers to bridge its security needs vis-à-vis stronger India. The convoluted internal economic situation of Pakistan along with its complex domestic security landscape added additional layer and challenges for internal balancing to address its complicated security calculus.

Now, for Pakistan, the Indo-U.S. partnership casts a long shadow, triggering a series of strategic recalibrations and policy adjustments. The intensification of India's strategic alignment with the United States under GPC presents Pakistan with a multifaceted security predicament, one marked by concerns about military asymmetry, diplomatic isolation, and altered regional dynamics. The implications of this partnership reverberate through Pakistan's national security considerations, foreign policy choices, and regional posture. It puts Pakistan in a strategic quandary to choose sides: prioritizing geo-economics brings it closer to China, while prioritizing geo-politics that shifts it closer to the United States; or else, remain neutral, which has its own strategic challenges. However, Pakistan's geo-security assurances from either of great power serve as rider-clause in any of its choices.

This chapter initially highlights the taxonomy of Pakistan's security dilemma and subsequently explores its security complexities under the backdrop of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. The deepening Indo-U.S. ties, particularly in the realm of defense

and strategic cooperation, have emboldened Indian strategic thinkers to adopt a more assertive stance toward Pakistan. This shift is driven not only by India's long-standing desire for regional dominance but also by the high-tech defense technology and political support it has garnered from the United States.

A. TAXONOMY OF PAKISTAN'S SECURITY DILEMMA

Pakistan's quest for security and stability is an enduring challenge that requires its defense and security to attain higher priority.²¹⁵ Pakistan's security dilemma is deeply rooted in the country's historical legacy including scars of partition, hostile neighbors, and regional geopolitical dynamics—"unnatural and disunited [country's]geography,"²¹⁶ insufficient military and financial shares from British's resources, competitive territorial claims with India,²¹⁷ disputes over water distribution, and contrasting views about ideology and nationalism entrenched security centric policies in Pakistan.²¹⁸ Subsequently, these security apprehensions fermented by multiple wars with India, near-war crisis escalated over varying issues, internal faults and disunity exploited by such external forces as India leading to dismemberment of its Eastern Wing in 1971, and border demarcation and delimitation issues with Afghanistan—the manager of country has remained entangled in web of disputes involving security landscape.²¹⁹ India-Pakistan strategic rivalry has consumed substantial resources, hampered all attempts at regional cooperation, and perpetuated a cycle of mistrust and insecurity.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Muhammad Samrez Salik and Khadija Younus, "Pakistan's Security Compulsions: External & Internal Dimensions," *Margalla Papers* 23, no. 1 (2019): 39; Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 123.

²¹⁶ Pakistan constituted East and West wings with both apart by 1000 miles with hostile India in between.

²¹⁷ Significant territorial disputes were on issues of princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagadh.

²¹⁸ 'Ashley J. Tellis, *Striking Asymmetries: Nuclear Transitions in Southern Asia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022), 135–36, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202207-Tellis_Striking_Asymmetries-final.pdf; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 137.

²¹⁹ 'A.Z. Hilali, 'Pakistan's Security Dilemma', in *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, by A.Z. Hilali (New York: Routledge, 2005), 31.

²²⁰ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 407.

Pakistan's persistent security dilemma arises in response to a stronger India that desires to undo Partition and attempts to absorb it. Indian polity from political rulers to policymakers passed threatening statements to "absorb Pakistan or turn [it] into a satellite" by expressing reservations on existence of Pakistan and expected collapse of Pakistan and its return to India.²²¹ Significant incessant claims of these are: remarks by Gandhi on "interdependence [of India and Pakistan] on one another. . . . The Muslim league [Pakistan] will ask to come back to Hindustan [India];" Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, expressed that "It [Pakistan] should not have been created, and it would never have happened had the British not stood behind foolish idea of Muhammad Ali Jinnah;" and, Kriplani, then President of Indian National Congress, declared "Neither the Congress nor the nation has given up its claims of a United India."²²² India's belligerence compelled newborn Pakistan into a direction where its very survival depended on countering India through bolstering its security capabilities.²²³

Pakistan's relations and foreign policy goals since its inception have been filtered through a security prism, so Pakistan has gravitated toward regional and global powers to address its defense needs and shore up its security dilemma.²²⁴ Cold War alignment put India in the Communist block and Pakistan improved its relations with a Western-led alliance under the United States to balance projected threats from India and shape its core insecurity dynamic.²²⁵ In May 1954, Pakistan entered into a mutual security agreement with the United States and subsequently solidified its security alliance by joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact—a strategic alignment, which titled Pakistan as "most allied ally,"—provided sophisticated military and economic assistance crucial for Pakistan's survival, and diplomatic support for

²²¹ Tellis, *Striking Asymmetries*, 135–36; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 138.

²²² Hilali, 'Pakistan's Security Dilemma,' 33.

²²³ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 42.

²²⁴ Pande, 38, 314.

²²⁵ Savita Pande, "India as a Factor in Pakistan's Policy," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Pakistan*, ed. Aparna Pande (New York: Routledge, 2017), 431, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315696706-27>.

ongoing conflicts over Kashmir with India and tensions with Afghanistan regarding the Durand Line border.²²⁶ In spite of its security partnership with the United States, the United States failed to provide military or diplomatic support to Pakistan during Indian aggression of 1965 and the 1971 war.²²⁷ On the contrary, during same period, Pakistan improved its relationship with China that resulted in unprecedented diplomatic support of China on disputes, provided military supplies²²⁸ during wars with India, and bridged its security needs resulting from the U.S. sanctions.²²⁹ Pakistan had sought alliances from global players to shore up its security dilemma.

Apart from confronting an antagonistic India to the east, Pakistan also had to deal with an Afghanistan that expressed irredentist tendencies to the west, and intermittently complicated Pakistan's security dilemma—invasions by great powers reshaped and constricted not only Pakistan's choices but also left a lasting imprint on its national security policies and foreign relations. Afghanistan neither recognized the Durand Line as an international frontier nor considered erstwhile Northwest Frontier Post (NWFP) as part of Pakistan; it also cast the only vote against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations.²³⁰ Moreover, India and the Soviet Union colluded and supported Afghanistan's stance on boundary demarcation treaty, escalating Pakistan's security concern.²³¹ The Afghan conflict, including the Soviet invasion, the subsequent U.S. intervention, and the rise of the Taliban, has also deeply impacted Pakistan's security dilemma. Influenced by the proximity to the conflict, the decision to adopt a foreign policy choice to align with the United States to contain Soviet Union earlier and the Taliban later led to mass influx of

²²⁶ Rahat Shah, "Pakistan's Quest for Balance in the Context of the Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2022): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18366503.2021.1925467>.

²²⁷ Amin and Qiaorui, "Security of Pakistan under the Shadow of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership," 6504.

²²⁸ China provided \$2.9 billion of arms supply to Pakistan from 1965–79. Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 315.

²²⁹ Pande, 299–300.

²³⁰ Hilali, "Pakistan's Security Dilemma," 42–44.

²³¹ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 299; Hilali, "Pakistan's Security Dilemma," 42, 45, 47.

millions of Afghan refugees into Pakistan, which radicalized its society and proliferated extremist ideologies affecting domestic security landscape; strained Pakistan's existing scanty resources and infrastructure, leading to economic and social challenges; affected Pakistan to deploy significant strength of its armed forces along western border in support of the U.S. operations; and, resulted in an unprecedented surge of terrorists attacks across the country against civilian, government, and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) resulting in more than 75,000 casualties and economic losses of more than \$123 billion alone in the last two decades.²³² Nonetheless, such historical events as the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan with Pakistan as a crucial ally, although marked by substantial economic and military support for Pakistan, culminated in an abrupt, unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the region, Pakistan as a sanctioned country despite of its economic and human sacrifices, and Afghanistan in turbulent and chaotic situation.²³³ Ultimately, the inconsistent engagement of the United States in the region exacerbated Pakistan's security concerns and compounded its foreign relations.²³⁴

Another dimension of Pakistan's security concerns stemmed from India's pursuit of nuclear capabilities, coupled with the U.S. backing of India, which prompted Pakistan to reevaluate its security stance. The deep-seated animosity between India and Pakistan has been a primary driver behind South Asia's nuclearization.²³⁵ The international community's response to India's nuclearization in 1974, particularly the lack of significant sanctions or pressure on India, contributed to Pakistan's security concerns. This event shadowed Pakistan's recent dismemberment in the hands of India resulting in its East Wing becoming Bangladesh—it intensified Pakistan's looming existential threat.²³⁶ However, Pakistan's nuclear program received no support from the United States, considered as its

²³² Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 41, 42, 205, 315; Pande, "India as a Factor in Pakistan's Policy," 432; Hussain, "Pakistan's Quest for Security," 83.

²³³ Umbreen Javaid and Marium Kamal, "Security Dilemma in South Asia," *Journal of Political Studies* 22, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 125; Pande, "India as a Factor in Pakistan's Policy," 432; Shabana Fayyaz, "Countering Strategic Coercion: A Case Study of Pakistan," *Margalla Papers* 23, no. 2 (2019): 88.

²³⁴ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 205, 315.

²³⁵ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 168.

²³⁶ Šumit Ganguly and Frank O'Donnell, *Routledge Handbook of the International Relations of South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), 84, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003246626>.

traditional key ally, rather multiple sanctions followed to limit its development of nuclear program.²³⁷ Thereby, Pakistan's security managers sought to tackle this predicament by employing two traditional strategies: forging alliances with such major global powers as China to enhance their defensive capabilities and developing nuclear deterrence to counterbalance India's military advantage.²³⁸ Furthermore, the nuclear deal between the United States and India under the Hyde Act conferred *de jure* recognition upon India as a nuclear weapons state, despite India not being a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The agreement also granted India exemptions from the specific provisions of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 and provided India with access to civilian nuclear technology and nuclear fuel without requiring International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.²³⁹ This development raised concerns in Pakistan regarding the regional strategic balance. These developments are destabilizing for regional strategic stability.

Moving forward, the enhanced Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, especially in defense and security, has reduced Pakistan's stature as tactical partner to the United States—it added another layer to Pakistan's security dilemma. Historically, the United States has been key provider of economic and military aid to Pakistan. However, the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has resulted in U.S. strategic overtures to India and the waning of Pakistan's strategic relevance.²⁴⁰ Presently, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship symbolizes “misalliances” and “a bad marriage” of “an estranged couple that share the same bed but dream different dreams.”²⁴¹

The Pakistani state's strategic culture deeply embeds fears about the survival of the nation-state and consequently, national security and identity are assessed through this

²³⁷ Javaid and Kamal, “Security Dilemma in South Asia,” 125.

²³⁸ Bukhari, “India–United States Strategic Partnership: Implications for Pakistan,” 2.

²³⁹ Ahmad and Gul, “Neo-Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Challenges for Pakistan,” 16, 20; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 2.

²⁴⁰ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 36–38.

²⁴¹ Shuja Nawaz, *The Battle for Pakistan: The Bitter U.S. Friendship and a Tough Neighbourhood* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), xxxi.

perspective, intensifying its security perceptions.²⁴² With such travails, it is not surprising that Pakistan's security dilemma is India centric and stems from the notion of surviving with dignity, maintaining sovereignty at all costs, and addressing such territorial disputes as Kashmir.²⁴³

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

The GPC and the evolving Indo-U.S. strategic partnership challenges Pakistan's geopolitical and strategic landscape. As the United States recalibrates its global priorities in response to China Dream, it is increasingly deepening its strategic ties with India, thus reshaping the power dynamics in South Asia. For Pakistan, this transformation carries multifaceted implications, mainly in diplomatic and security domain. It is worthwhile to highlight that the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has deepened exponentially after labelling China as competitor and the United States has capitalized India's partnership by building on Sino-Indian rivalry and supporting India's desire for regional status to add an additional front for China at Indian Ocean—dynamics of GPC and the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership are inter-related. However, these moves are considered perilous for Pakistan's security and have raised serious debate in policy circles on how to counter hegemonic India's threat. This section initially maps implications of GPC and subsequently connects the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership—both, compounding Pakistan's security dilemma.

1. GPC

China Dream and the Indo-Pacific strategy under rubrics of GPC proliferates and multiplies the challenges for Pakistan. As a strategically-located nation at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan finds itself in a complex geopolitical landscape. The Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States to contain China in the Indian Ocean through building strategic partnership with India comes in direct conflict with Xi's China Dream to enhance its influence in South Asia through Pakistan—manifestation of global contestation at regional level with both great powers having

²⁴² Feroz Hassan Khan, "Strategic Risk Management in Southern Asia," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (2022): 370, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2136878>.

²⁴³ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 103.

different partners compound the equation, more for Pakistan. While Pakistan has previously maintained friendly relations with both the United States and China, the intensifying GPC would compel Pakistan to make a challenging decision to either align with the United States, a longstanding ally and superpower, or China, its all-weather trusted friend and emerging strategic partner, or remain non-aligned.²⁴⁴ Whatever option Pakistan pursues it comes at a considerable cost, thereby, GPC has radiated structural challenge for Pakistan to calibrate foreign and security policies, narrowed its strategic space for maneuverability, and molded paths to develop options that has more of a strategic ambiguity toward the great powers.

In siding with China's BRI under GPC to address Pakistan's economic and security interests aggravate its unsteady and fragile relations with the United States Pakistan has prioritized geoeconomics over geopolitics by forging strategic economic partnership with China through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under BRI to address its infrastructure, security, energy, and broader economic development. However, the United States regards BRI as a manifestation of China Dream to restore its predominant position at the global level, an instrument to achieve its great rejuvenation, expand its regional influence, undermine the U.S. build rule-based order, and a strategic challenge to U.S. fundamental interests, values, and overall liberal order.²⁴⁵ Moreover, CPEC enables China to reflect its win-win cooperation, enhance its outreach in South Asia, and offset its Malacca Dilemma, which is contradictory to the U.S. regional geopolitical priorities.²⁴⁶ Whereas Pakistan views its engagement of BRI as growth axis and development belt that is game changer for its economy and security, and efforts by Islamabad to counter aggressive growing India by increasing its national power. Thus, divergent opinion and contradictory views over BRI lead to the U.S. adversarial relations with Pakistan.

²⁴⁴ Zaidi and Nirmal, "Regional Political Paradigm Shift," 774.

²⁴⁵ David Arase, "U.S. Concerns Regarding the Belt and Road Initiative," in *The Routledge Handbook of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific*, by Oliver Turner, Nicola Nymalm, and Wali Aslam (London: Routledge, 2022), 446–48, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003018322-36>.

²⁴⁶ Muhammad Saeed, "From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-U.S. Strategic Competition," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 03, no. 4 (2017): 499–502, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740017500324>.

The U.S. desire to manage China's rise under the GPC elevated India's regional importance in the U.S. strategic discourse and introduced complex dynamics into its ties with Pakistan.²⁴⁷ The United States and China are actively pursuing competing strategies in the region, aiming to pivot as many countries as possible toward them. This global contest for influence and resources has ramifications that trickle down to South Asia. In this context, the regional rivalries between China and India, as well as between India and Pakistan, compound the security landscape and give rise to a classical security dilemma.²⁴⁸ The United States perceives the China Dream as a geopolitical challenge and is determined to maintain its hegemony through India to check China's encroachment in Indian Ocean and extend its diminishing regional influence.²⁴⁹ Resultantly, its Indo-Pacific strategy advocates India's role as an NSP, a regional hegemon in South Asia, and supports latter Act East policy to challenge 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative under China Dream.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, this concept compounds Islamabad's problem, since policy has no or limited say of Pakistan—enabling India as an offshore balancer for the United States has polarized the region and pushed Pakistan to choose sides.²⁵¹ Navigating this delicate balance poses a strategic challenge to Pakistan and carries substantial consequences, given its reliance on Washington for security and Beijing for economic growth.²⁵²

Under GPC, the United States has bolstered India to vie for more robust global representation and assurances, which enables New Delhi to leverage its influence on its issues with Pakistan.²⁵³ The United States, in its pursuit of strategic interests in the region has established India as natural trusted ally and vehemently supports its rise, which in turn has made India “aspirational”—India envisions itself as a rising power in Asia or the Asian

²⁴⁷ Khan, “U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 53–54; Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 7–8.

²⁴⁸ Khan, “Strategic Risk Management in Southern Asia,” 371.

²⁴⁹ Saeed, “From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific,” 507–8.

²⁵⁰ Saeed, 504–7.

²⁵¹ Khan, “U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 63–64.

²⁵² Zaidi and Nirmal, “Regional Political Paradigm Shift,” 774.

²⁵³ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 216.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); aspires to have more say in global arenas; seeks a permanent seat on the UNSC; and demands security assurances from the United States to counter China.²⁵⁴ India views Pakistan as a significant obstacle in its quest for great-power status and perceives Pakistan as a major security threat, particularly concerning its relationship with China.²⁵⁵ Status as a permanent UNSC member would provide India with veto power over UNSC resolutions especially on Kashmir disputes, enabling it to undermine Pakistan's interests. Given the current circumstances, stemming from India's deepening partnership with the United States, the existing differences between India and Pakistan are unlikely to be resolved. Consequently, their enduring territorial disputes are poised to perpetuate a state of continuous military antagonism in the region.²⁵⁶ Thereby, India's increased influence within critical global institutions could pose a significant security risk for Pakistan.

This choice of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has become more robust at the expense of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Indian strategic planners have a long desire to dominate Pakistan, which would have not been possible without exceptional political, economic, and security support of the United States under the Indo-Pacific strategy, while such support is being denied to Pakistan by the United States. Thereby, it is not surprising that Pakistan considers itself “an underdog, awkwardly juxtaposed against a hostile and dominant military power [India]” that itches to inflict military defeat on Pakistan.²⁵⁷ The shift in the balance of power in favor of India poses a considerable threat to Pakistan's security, compelling Pakistan to explore alternative policies and strategies to counter India's advancements. Islamabad is pushed to engage in agreements with other key players which are akin to India's agreements with the United States to forestall the negative impact.²⁵⁸ These changes present substantial challenges for Pakistan's policymakers,

²⁵⁴ Zaidi and Nirmal, “Regional Political Paradigm Shift,” 776; Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 294; Amin and Qiaorui, “Security of Pakistan under the Shadow of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership,” 6511.

²⁵⁵ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 176.

²⁵⁶ Bukhari, 222.

²⁵⁷ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 40.

²⁵⁸ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 20.

particularly in the realm of security, where they must work to preserve a balance of power and address the existing asymmetry with India.²⁵⁹ Hence, a direct correlation exists between Pakistan’s security, the regional strategic equilibrium in the era of GPC, and the strategic partnership between India and the United States.²⁶⁰

2. Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership

The Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary geopolitics, significantly impacting the security landscape of Pakistan. India wants to prevent external involvement in regional affairs; Pakistan embraces external partnerships but faces challenges with respect to which power to balance with. Meanwhile, the well-established Indo-U.S. relationship is significantly and rapidly altering Pakistan’s security situation. This partnership escalates regional rivalries, emboldens the hegemonic aspirations of India, disturbs regional strategic stability, and hardens India’s stance on territorial disputes. Overall, the strategic relationship has all the ingredients to maximize Pakistan’s security apprehensions. In the midst of a classic security dilemma characterized by escalating competition and deepening mutual distrust, the likelihood of a military crisis erupting in South Asia appears more than imminent.²⁶¹

This choice of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has become more robust at the expense of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. This transformation of regional alliance structures with India working on the behest of the United States has made the former more self-assured, unyielding, and uncompromising—challenging Pakistan’s ability to pursue its national interests. Via a relationship with the United States, India perceives itself as a regional hegemon within its immediate neighborhood, which it considers as its backyard. It has also taken on the role of “the guarantor of regional security and stability” and anticipates that neighboring states will align their foreign policies with India’s central

²⁵⁹ Bukhari, 5–9.

²⁶⁰ Amin and Qiaorui, “Security of Pakistan under the Shadow of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership,” 6511.

²⁶¹ Feroz Hassan Khan, “Security Dilemma in South Asia: Building Arsenals and Living with Distrust,” *Nação e Defesa: Nuclear Proliferation*, no. 140 (2015): 84.

position in the region.²⁶² Resultantly, GPC has transformed consideration of the region by U.S. policymakers from India's lens. These policy shifts enable India to not only influence the region but also to extend its hegemonic ambition against Pakistan, thus compounding latter's security challenges.²⁶³ Attempts by India to annex Kashmir by scrapping Article 370 of India's constitution providing autonomy to Kashmir is one such manifestation of India's pursuance of adventurism under growing Indo-U.S. collaboration representing "the crux of the whole security dilemma."²⁶⁴ Additionally, the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership strengthens India's unending desire of "Akhund-Bharat [Bigger India]" to bully Pakistan—revealed in such statements by Indian political leaders as: "Pakistan is an accident of history, and must be 'forced to its knees,'" or India must "hold [Pakistan's] feet to the fire" reflect enduring rivalry, deep animosity, and entrenched frustrations of India over Pakistan.²⁶⁵ India's ascendancy over Pakistan has significantly influenced geopolitical postures, with the collaboration between India and the United States acting as a catalyst, enabling India to assert and pursue its strategic objectives.

In addition, India also rejects the role of external powers in its dispute and has gone assertive and confrontationist against Pakistan on territorial disputes—it has resulted in deadlock on bilateral disputes.²⁶⁶ India adheres to a policy of eschewing the involvement of international organizations or external powers in its bilateral relations with other states in South Asia, a stance that includes both China and the United States.²⁶⁷ India despises interference, especially of China, in South Asia, inspired by belief that this region constitutes an integral part of its "civilizational sphere of influence."²⁶⁸ The same is

²⁶² Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 2; Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 139.

²⁶³ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 5–6.

²⁶⁴ Nawaz, *The Battle for Pakistan*, xxxi; Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, xii, xiii, 1; Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 407.

²⁶⁵ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 6; Zaidi and Nirmal, "Regional Political Paradigm Shift," 774.

²⁶⁶ Ahmad and Gul, "Neo-Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Challenges for Pakistan," 18.

²⁶⁷ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 139.

²⁶⁸ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 8.

evident from four near-war crisis situations between India and Pakistan over the last decade, in which the United States had no role or influence over India to manage escalation and consistently favored India's perspective, showing little concern for Pakistan's perspective.²⁶⁹ For example, the absence of U.S. condemnation for Indian "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan during Pulwama crisis and its silence suggests a "tacit approval" by the United States of Indian actions—because of India's view of regional dynamics, strategic collaboration with India impedes Washington's capacity to mediate conflicts between New Delhi and Islamabad.²⁷⁰ All of these has bolstered India to settle any dispute with Pakistan without peaceful means and enhanced probabilities of an all-out war.²⁷¹

Similarly, this collaboration has intensified India's hegemonic intentions and hostilities toward Pakistan as reflected by the statements of such Indian leaders as Doval, India's National Security Advisor, who advocated the adoption of "offensive-defense" strategy, aiming to exploit political, internal security, and economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan or General Bikram Singh, former Indian Army Chief, suggesting the use of "kinetic/non-kinetic" and "overt/covert" means to penalize Pakistan.²⁷² This trend was also evident in the election campaigns of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in both 2014 and 2019, when anti-Pakistan rhetoric played a significant role in his victory.²⁷³

In addition to complicating Pakistan's calculus with respect to alliances, the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership, characterized by extensive defense collaboration, has eroded military balance, and widened the existing disparity in conventional military capabilities between India and Pakistan. India's partnership with the United States has been utilized by India for shopping sophisticated conventional arms, latest missile technologies, fighter aircrafts, ships, submarines, radars, surveillance equipment, and acquisition of advanced defense technology.²⁷⁴ Resultantly, India has risen to become the world's largest arms

²⁶⁹ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 206.

²⁷⁰ Bukhari, 206–8, 215.

²⁷¹ Mahrukh Khan, "U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," 63–64.

²⁷² Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 177.

²⁷³ Bukhari, 176.

²⁷⁴ Bukhari, 203.

importer, and the United States has established itself as a principal arms supplier to India, securing defense contracts worth more than US\$15 billion over the past decade.²⁷⁵ This shift exacerbates the pre-existing conventional military disparity between India and Pakistan, tilts power equilibrium in favor of India, entails India's more assertive stance toward Pakistan, and propels Indian strategic planners to exert dominance.²⁷⁶ Disparity between India and Pakistan in defense expenditure as well as procurement of military equipment, has provided New Delhi capability to manifest its Pro Active Strategy (PAS)—an offensive military concept to wage short and intense war to degrade Pakistan military. Thereby, these asymmetries of Pakistan with India trigger a security dilemma and force Pakistan to shop similar arms from other global players, thus engaging in a debilitating arms race to bridge security concerns and rejuvenating instability in the region.²⁷⁷

Parallel to conventional asymmetries, the landmark U.S.-India nuclear deal has impacted global nonproliferation regimes, destabilized nuclear deterrence, and exacerbated nuclear tension between India and Pakistan—destabilizing Pakistan's security environment. Furthermore, it also underscores how great powers, in pursuit of their strategic interests, can at times prioritize those interests over non-proliferation commitments, potentially circumventing their international obligations.²⁷⁸ The deal challenges the principles underpinning global nonproliferation regimes, undermines decades of the U.S. nonproliferation initiatives, weakens the global nuclear order,²⁷⁹ haunts the dynamics of nuclear parity, allows India to manipulate the threshold, and fuels a nuclear arms race in Asia.²⁸⁰ Historically, Pakistan has maintained a nuclear program

²⁷⁵ Bukhari, 208.

²⁷⁶ Bukhari, 20, 206.

²⁷⁷ Bukhari, 209; Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, xvi; Bukhari, "India-United States Strategic Partnership: Implications for Pakistan," 21.

²⁷⁸ Tauqeer Hussain Sargana, "Strategic Considerations Overriding the Non-Proliferation Priorities: An Analysis of Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Deal," *Margalla Papers* 27, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 40–52, <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.27.1.150>.

²⁷⁹ The global nuclear order, which has kept the nuclear proliferation regime intact, is based on the United States Atomic Energy Act of 1954; Non-proliferation Treaty; the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 2–3.

²⁸⁰ Bukhari, 2–3.

solely focused on countering the Indian threat, offsetting its conventional asymmetry, and avoiding arms race.²⁸¹ Furthermore, enhanced collaboration between the United States and India, especially in dual-use of high-end technology has resulted in India's penetration in Pakistan's deterrence capability—it contributes to India's defense capabilities, expands its nuclear arsenals, and allows it to develop sophisticated high-end missile and related delivery system having increased lethality and accuracy.²⁸² These developments adversely impact strategic deterrence between India and Pakistan—it affects not only Pakistan's strategic equation but also seriously casts doubt on the notion of bridging its security dilemma with India through nuclear deterrence, and thereby, hampers the cornerstones of Pakistan's security.²⁸³ Jaspal best encapsulates this by stating “the conventional asymmetry and nuclear threshold of Pakistan are inversely proportional: the higher the asymmetry, the lower the threshold, the lower the asymmetry, the higher the threshold.”²⁸⁴

Collaboration in the space domain between India and the United States also erodes Pakistan's conventional military capacity to effectively counter potential Indian aggression. This cooperation has significantly contributed to enhancing India's capabilities in surveillance, reconnaissance, and missile development—it also has enabled India to advance satellite programs.²⁸⁵ India has also exploited dual-use features of high-end technologies provided by the United States under space security by investing in military space capabilities, developing advance missiles, and testing anti-satellite weapon (ASAT)—resulted in militarization of space, taking the arms race to outer space, and showcasing its “technological capabilities and ambitions as great power.”²⁸⁶ Additionally,

²⁸¹ Bukhari, 2, 9.

²⁸² Ahmad and Gul, “Neo-Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Challenges for Pakistan,” 16, 19; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 20.

²⁸³ Ahmad and Gul, “Neo-Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Challenges for Pakistan,” 18; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 9.

²⁸⁴ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 207–8.

²⁸⁵ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 213.

²⁸⁶ Namrata Goswami, “India's Space Program, Ambitions, and Activities,” *Asia Policy* 27, no. 2 (2020): 44–48, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2020.0022>; Ullah and Hayat, “India as a Net Security Provider in Indo-Pacific and Implications for the Region,” 33; Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 213.

such agreements as BECA have provided India with real-time access to U.S sensitive geospatial intelligence and critical information and enhanced the accuracy of such automated weapons systems as missiles and drone by providing navigation and targeting. These developments are likely to pose a significant risk to Pakistani military movements and its freedom of action during any potential future conflict. These agreements and capabilities thereby enable India to detect troops deployment, identify exact locations of targets, freely choose, and hit the target as per its choice and freedom.²⁸⁷

Indo-U.S. bilateral defense cooperation has resulted in gradual development of India's domestic defense industrial base, which has enabled India to manufacture advance military equipment, which poses challenges for Pakistan's military capabilities. DTTI coupled with Industrial Security Annex (ISA) have facilitated the transfer of advanced defense technologies and equipment from the United States to India, enhanced India's defense capabilities, and allowed New Delhi to access cutting-edge military technology, which, in turn, has strengthened India's security.²⁸⁸ These initiatives fostered closer ties between respective defense industries to undertake collaborative research and development projects, joint ventures, cooperation in maritime security and maritime domain awareness, and defense procurement deals. Resultantly, India has significantly overcome difficulties and challenges in manufacturing high-end military equipment, considerably reduced its dependence on imports of military equipment, and boosted its defense industrial base.²⁸⁹ These developments add another layer to complex challenges of Pakistan's military capabilities and its effort to bridge the conventional asymmetry.

Moreover, India's conclusion of recent multiple defense initiatives—for example, the U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) and Defense Jet Engine Deal, Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRA), and Information Exchange Annex (IEA)—reflect continued progression of Indo-U.S. strategic partnership and further complicates security mosaic for Pakistan. ICET enables the private sector of both the

²⁸⁷ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security, and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 214.

²⁸⁸ Bukhari, 33, 117.

²⁸⁹ Bukhari, 126.

United States and India to cooperate on sensitive, advance, and emerging technologies by lifting barriers from the U.S. side and supporting India to overcome its earlier barriers and challenges faced by defense industrial complex.²⁹⁰ The jet engine deal involves the transfer of sophisticated technology (up to 80% by the United States to India) that will enable India to master fighter jet engine technology. It will address key challenges of Indian Air Force to overhaul engines of its fighter fleet, manage IAF parity in the region, develop advance engine indigenously, and address IAF issues of undertaking reconnaissance and surveillance along its border. Moreover, MSRA along with IEA to augment existing agreements between the United States and India on maritime security cooperation and exchange—the significance of IEA resides in the U.S. support to overcome India’s challenges to develop its aircraft carrier.²⁹¹ Additionally, as earlier concluded, DTTI also aids India in its aircraft support system.²⁹² In parallel of developing maritime hardware, India has reviewed its software (i.e., maritime policy) which highlights transformation of India’s posture to pre-eminence from an earlier defense, that stands in line with India’s proclaimed status of NSP and its legitimized envisaged security role. These developments have direct bearing on future challenges in air and naval domain for Pakistan—the initiatives undermine present capabilities of Pakistan.

Overall, this partnership reflects the U.S. policies characterized by “discrimination, exceptionalism, and selectivity”—the U.S. support to India for conventional arms build-up, un-checked supply of nuclear materials, NSG waiver and other export control regimes, the India–U.S. 123 nuclear deal, and unique defense collaboration agreements tailored for India has emboldened New Delhi for adventurous stance against Pakistan and disturbed the strategic stability and concept of power equilibrium in the region.²⁹³ This in turn, deteriorates the security environment in the region.

²⁹⁰ ‘Arun Prakash, ‘US-India Technology Initiative and the Recent iCET’, *Vayu Aerospace and Defence Review*, no. 2 (2023): 2, ProQuest.

²⁹¹ Bukhari, Pakistan’s Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership, 134.

²⁹² Bukhari, 117.

²⁹³ Bukhari, 213–16, 218.

C. CONCLUSIONS

Pakistan's foreign policy has centered on checking and containing India's ambition and adventurous policy in the region. Historically, Pakistan, being a security-seeking state since its birth, embraced external powers and their roles by forging partnership with great powers to protect itself from India and draw attention to its security thinking and threat perception, rooted in its long-standing dispute with India.²⁹⁴ Although Pakistan possesses structural limitations, vulnerabilities in its geographical location, and has comparatively less size and influence, it stands as the sole South Asian nation that contests India's dominance.²⁹⁵ Pakistan pursues a policy of balance in response to the projected threats from its neighbor.²⁹⁶ Thus, Pakistan's foreign and security policy is driven by a fervent desire to check "hegemonic" India in South Asia.²⁹⁷

Pakistan faces a complex and evolving security dilemma because of the deepening collaboration between India and the United States. After exploring the animosity between India and Pakistan, current military capability of India, and areas of defense and security cooperation under the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, it is contended that subject partnership has brought drastic structural changes in India's strategic thinking, military capabilities, and resulting modernization of its armed forces.²⁹⁸ The cooperation in such high-tech areas as space, innovative technologies, nuclear field, and missile program, along with support for enabling domestic defense production infrastructure, including the transfer of technology, has energized military asymmetry with Pakistan and enabled India to destabilize the strategic balance in the region.²⁹⁹

This partnership has empowered India to assert itself as an NSP in the Indo-Pacific region, disrupted the regional balance of power, escalated conventional asymmetries,

²⁹⁴ Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia*, 98.

²⁹⁵ Khan, 26.

²⁹⁶ Pande, "India as a Factor in Pakistan's Policy," 425.

²⁹⁷ Pande, *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy*, 4.

²⁹⁸ Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership*, 206, 207.

²⁹⁹ Bukhari, 9, 10, 11, 218; Bukhari, *India-United States Strategic Partnership*, 1; Khan, *Pakistan's Quest for Balance in the Context of the Indo-Pacific Strategy*, 43.

heightened tensions on border disputes, triggered an arms race, and generated bloc politics. As India continues to enhance its military capabilities, expand its influence in the Indian Ocean, steadily shift posture from defense to pre-eminence, and assert itself aggressively on territorial disputes, Pakistan finds itself in a precarious position.

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V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has sought to explain how the rise of China as a global superpower, China's launch of BRI as a flagship project from Pakistan, the strategic contest of China Dream with Indo-Pacific Strategy, and resultant offshore balancing by the United States to contain China through deepening the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership affect Islamabad's geopolitical positioning, exacerbate its security dilemma, and complicate its future choices.

A. OVERALL FINDINGS

Overall, Pakistan's security dilemma is being exacerbated by GPC and the evolving Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. Contemporary strategic environment manifest overlapping levels of competition in spectrum of GPC for dominance. Pointed rivalries between the United States and China for status of global hegemon intersects with interstate rivalry between China and India for regional influence and leadership. The mosaic gets a new dimension when enduring rivalry of India and Pakistan is added to matrix. India's effort to avert China's ascendancy via strategic partnership with the United States and Pakistan's effort to forge relationship with China results in persistence of security dilemma in South Asia.

China is positioning itself as a global power with an ambitious vision, dubbed the "China Dream." This vision encompasses achieving comprehensive national power, sustaining economic growth, modernizing its military, building alliances by making other states economically dependent on China, and achieving global governance to exert its influence on the world stage and displace the U.S.-led rule-based order. It comes in direct conflict with U.S. geopolitical and geostrategic objectives contended under the Indo-Pacific Strategy. India's disputes with China over territorial claims, divergences over maritime security order in the Indian Ocean, and assertive contention for regional hegemon has brought it closer to the United States—transforming their relationship to a strategic partnership provided leverage to the United States to limit China's dominance in South Asia and afforded an opportunity to India to modernize its military and pursue its hegemonic ambition in the region.

Moreover, the China Dream comes in direct conflict with U.S. geopolitical and geostrategic objectives contended under the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy has significantly evolved to shifting geopolitical dynamics and its foreign policy objectives to secure political, economic, and military supremacy in the 21st century against revisionist China. Alliances, modernizing key partners' defense capabilities, and importantly strengthening Indo-U.S. cooperation constitutes its key line of effort against China to ensure that regional states remain independent. However, India differs from the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, mainly over geographical extension of Indian Ocean, inclusion of China in the region, and the U.S. approach over its conflict with China—it avoids a confrontationist approach with China in line with its traditional pillars of non-alignment and strategic autonomy.

Historically, Pakistan has been the key ally of the United States, especially during its fight against communism and its multiple involvements in Afghanistan. This has resulted in Pakistan modernizing its armed forces, acquiring high-end military equipment, and receiving substantial economic support through financial assistance. However, misalignment of U.S. and Pakistan's interests over war in Afghanistan, the U.S. dissatisfaction over Pakistan's contributions and attribution of its own strategic failure to Islamabad and subsequent fears of Pakistan falling into China's geopolitical camp, apprehensions over CPEC, and strategic dividend it offers to China resulted in waning of Pakistan's relevance to the United States. Non-reflection of Pakistan in the policy documents covering the Indo-Pacific Strategy by the United States and criticizing Islamabad in its South Asia Strategy validates this belief in de-prioritizing Pakistan in Washington policy circles.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has enjoyed “all-weather friendship” and “iron-clad” relations with China, and both retain long-standing rivalries with India. This results in China's consistent support of Pakistan on its key issues over Kashmir. Off late, China has been primary benefactor of Pakistan's pivot to geo-economics through CPEC and related infrastructure development and has also provided key military equipment, especially during Pakistan's military stand-off with India. Thus, Pakistan heavily relies on China for bridging its security dilemma with India. However, such support has come at the cost of

enhancing Chinese influence in Pakistan’s policy circles and decision-making, labelling it as the “most exposed” country to China. Beijing manipulates the fact that no other country can provide what it can and exploits transactional and unreliable relations of the United States with Pakistan. Exclusion of Pakistan from policy priorities of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, NSS 2022, and NDS endorses China’s belief.

Overall, Pakistan’s security dilemma has exacerbated under GPC and involvement of regional actor, mainly India, with which Islamabad has enduring rivalry over ideological and territorial disputes. In the last two decades, the rivalry has escalated horizontally where Pakistan also marks India’s involvement in destabilizing its security situation by covertly supporting extremist groups and keeping its western front turbulent. Additionally, India’s strategic partnership with the United States has resulted in the former to aspire for great power status, pursue role as NSP, embolden its hegemonic intentions, harden its stance on territorial disputes, exert assertive behavior in its relations with neighbors, heighten its military asymmetry with Pakistan by modernizing its armed force, acquire high-end military equipment, indigenize its defense industrial base, manipulate dual-use of technology for military purpose, develop sophisticated military systems, and above all sign strategic enabling agreements with the United States to enhance its operational awareness, interoperability, and strategic surveillance—all happening under pretext of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and its (strategy) envisaged role for India as a counterweight to China. These developments are perilous to Pakistan’s national and security interests and escalate its security dilemma, destabilize strategic stability, keep the region in military antagonism, engender an arms race between India and Pakistan, dilute Islamabad’s strategic deterrent, lower Islamabad’s nuclear threshold, compound Pakistan’s desire for settlement of border disputes, and impact Pakistan’s military wartime capabilities—all in all, enhance chances for military confrontation and push Pakistan for bloc politics with China. Moreover, the worsening of Pakistan’s economic outlook arising from external debts, lower economic growth, higher inflation, depreciating currency, dependence on energy imports, and growing budget deficits has heightened Pakistan’s security dilemma—its ability to exert influence has largely been curtailed due to its dependence on partners for financial bailouts.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Today's Pakistan, endowed with geostrategic location, lynchpin for regional connectivity, capable military, and nuclear power stands at difficult cross-roads—the country experiences poly-crisis, both, internally and externally. Based on overall findings, this research identifies inter-dependence of Pakistan's economy and security, and proposes re-designing, overhauling, and re-calibrating of Pakistan's foreign policy to have broader outlook and objectives that will address its overall security dilemma.

1. Diversification of Relationships

Addressing Pakistan's security dilemma requires a proactive approach to diversify its foreign partnerships and strengthen its involvement in regional, global, and multilateral organizations. This strategy aims to broaden Pakistan's network of alliances and amplify its influence in international affairs. By doing so, Pakistan can reduce its dependence on any single ally, promoting a more balanced and multifaceted foreign policy. This diversification will not only enhance Pakistan's security but also create opportunities for economic growth, regional stability, and constructive diplomatic relations. Diversification of relations between traditional partners must go side by side with broadenings of interests and partners—trade, investment, technology, agriculture, industry, and security cooperation, can be a basis for building strong relationships. Beyond the United States and China, Pakistan must pursue all-encompassing multi-dimensional foreign policy to expand its relations with such other key regional and global players as Turkey, Malaysia, Russia, Iran, and various leading Middle Eastern countries. However, while doing so it must exercise caution over geopolitical constraints and must not antagonize any great power in its pursuit of diversification. Additionally, it must also integrate deeply into such forums as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) by promoting diplomatic, economic, security, and cultural ties. Through collaboration with diverse countries and organizations, Pakistan can contribute to conflict resolution, economic development, and mutual security in its neighborhood—all contributing to address its security dilemma.

2. Balanced Engagement

Intensifying GPC has constrained historical leverage of Pakistan to chart the complexities of balancing between the United States and China, especially during the Cold War, Afghanistan invasion, and war on terrorism. Notably, recognizing its inherent structural weakness in economic and security domain, Pakistan must not pursue strategic alignment with any great power and eschew over-reliance and dependence on any single power. Avoiding alignment prevents Pakistan from being drawn into conflicts or disputes driven by the GPC, unduly involved in the crossfire of geopolitical competition, and maintain cordial relations with China and the United States to benefit from their economic and security assistance. Pakistan must also realize that choosing any side in GPC has serious prices to pay: though, it depends on strategic courtship with China, but alone does not address its economic and security concerns. Pakistan also deeply relies on the United States to evade its crises and challenges, for example, managing bailout package from International Monetary Fund (IMF) or addressing being on the grey list at Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Thus, the optimal strategy for Pakistan must be bilateralism blended with autonomous interest-based foreign policy that supports regional stability, economic prosperity, and its security concerns. Its revitalized policy must maintain equidistance from China and the United States, give reflection of neutrality and non-alignment, while avoiding confrontation with global powers, and address perception of being part of any geopolitical block. Though the approach has its own inherent challenges, it has long-term strategic dividends.

3. Rebuilding Relations with the United States

Pakistan faces second-order effects of GPC, and it has turned Pakistan-U.S. ties increasingly turbulent, especially in the backdrop of Indo-U.S. rapprochement and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. To address the same, Pakistan must re-set its relationship with the United States by adopting a comprehensive and forward-looking approach that goes beyond traditional security-centric interactions, one that doesn't rely on overly exaggerated expectations on both sides. This approach also promotes cooperation, economic development, conflict resolution, military assistance, and trust-building that will

help to reduce suspicions and misconceptions and addresses its broader security dilemma. Pakistan must engage the United States to view Islamabad as an independent partner rather than through the lens of another country or conflict, notably Afghanistan. A policy of de-hyphenation will enable Pakistan to foster a unique bilateral partnership with the United States. Furthermore, Pakistan must continue to strengthen counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, especially concerning regional stability, intelligence sharing, and actions against extremist elements.

Pakistan's transition toward a geo-economic approach, focusing on investment, trade, and connectivity, requires a re-evaluation of its relationship with the United States. Pakistan must realize that the United States remains Pakistan's largest export destination, while China is its supplier, and friction in its relations with the former are detrimental to its interests. Additionally, the United States must assist Pakistan by offering trade initiatives that expand economic ties beyond textiles to high-value sectors— technology and agriculture—and address Pakistan's economic woes, lessen its dependence on China, prevent Islamabad embracing China, and foster internal economic stability in Pakistan, thereby, addressing its economic insecurities.

Similarly, Pakistan must underscore that its enhanced security dependence on China and its continuous engagement stems from shift in regional security order, driven by the growing Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. While doing so, Islamabad must also highlight its concern to the United States for maintenance and supplies of military inventory provided by the United States earlier, like its F-16 fighter jets. In addition, Pakistan must emphasize its ongoing, persistent, and continuous fight against militancy and terrorism to the United States, for which provision of critical military capabilities are vital and in-line with U.S. regional and global security interests. Moreso, the United States must also recognize that it needs to de-hyphenate security cooperation with India over its historical military ties with Pakistan, and abandoning such relations with latter has its own ramifications, especially abandoning “most-allied ally” and “major non-NATO member” that fought as “front-line state” during the Cold War, Soviet invasion, and war on terror will reduce its influence and may not bode well in long term.

Additionally, Islamabad must highlight its concerns with the United States over its Indo-Pacific Strategy, most importantly its consideration as part of Middle East in the U.S. Central Command. The complex positioning reflects U.S. peripheralization of Pakistan from Indian Ocean as well as South Asia dynamics which also inhibit the U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander to take into consideration broad regional dynamics in making strategic decisions. The factor needs further deliberation in U.S. policy circles especially with regards to Washington's role in managing escalations between India and Pakistan under nuclear overhang. This also further hinders Pakistan and the United States to explore additional areas of broad strategic collaboration. So, the important question before the United States remains whether inclusion of Pakistan in broader construct of the Indo-Pacific Strategy enhances its geopolitical and regional options or curtails its engagement, and whether or not realignment of the U.S. geographical conception of the Indo-Pacific syncs with its allied and partners' definition of regional scope, and if yes, will it not serve U.S. interests where its Indo-Pacific Commander has insight of the complete region rather than coordinating with other command to pursue national interests and achieve unified stated objectives.

4. Reordering China's Priority

Pakistan must carefully evaluate its strategic alignment with China, ensuring that its foreign policy serves its own interests. Pakistan must continue to foster robust security cooperation with China to address shared security concerns effectively, including counterterrorism, regional stability, and its military imbalance with India to bridge its dilemma. Though China is a crucial ally, Islamabad needs to address overall skepticism growing over CPEC, China's lack of transparency on infrastructure projects, subsequent rising debt costs to Pakistan, and how it undermines its domestic production and export industry. To do this, Pakistan needs to strengthen its legal and regulatory framework for foreign investments, ensuring that it aligns with international standards. Also, Pakistan must actively seek bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with other countries to help in its access to new markets and decrease its economic reliance on China. The approach contributes to Pakistan's economic diversification, resilience, security, and enhances its overall strategic flexibility.

5. India's Influence: Charting Course

The rationality of India's centrality in foreign policy discourse of Pakistan resides in threat perception, coercion, belligerence, and hostility that India exhibits toward Pakistan. The crux of Pakistan's security dilemma is managing its relationship with India in a dignified manner. Islamabad needs to underscore the same, and it must highlight that unfinished agenda of partition continues to be ingrained in Islamabad's foreign policy and addressing the Kashmir dispute will not only resolve major source of irritation and friction in the region but also circumvent its security dilemma and over-dependence on China. Diplomatically, Pakistan must continue to raise its concerns over impact of strategic collaboration in defense and security between India and the United States on the Kashmir dispute, especially linking illegal annexation of Kashmir by abrogating Article 370 and demographic change in the disputed area through enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). While these postures may reflect the domestic political commitments of the Modi government, they are also a by-product of India's ongoing military modernization efforts.

C. CONCLUSION

Pakistan's security dilemma, exacerbated by such factors as the GPC, the China Dream, Indo-Pacific strategy, and Indo-U.S. collaboration, stands at a crucial juncture that holds the potential to significantly shape the nation's path in the years to come. The choices Pakistan makes in response to these challenges, including the ambitious aspirations of China's Dream, the strategic implications of the Indo-Pacific strategy, the dynamics of GPC, and the evolving nature of Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, will have profound implications not just within its borders but also on the geopolitical landscape. As Pakistan grapples with these decisions, its ability to maintain a delicate equilibrium between various power centers and pursue comprehensive foreign relations is not only vital for its own security and prosperity but is also indispensable for promoting peace, stability, and cooperation on a global scale.

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