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## **Sino-US Competition and Trump 2.0: Power Transition, Economic Statecraft, and Great-Power Strategies**

**Dr. Zahid Ullah**

Lecturer, Political Science at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: [zahid.ullah@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:zahid.ullah@awkum.edu.pk)

**Muhammad Uzair**

MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science at Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Email: [uzair16101@gmail.com](mailto:uzair16101@gmail.com)

**Fawad Hussain**

MPhil Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Email: [fawadhuss22@gmail.com](mailto:fawadhuss22@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

The article explores Sino-US relations in the second Trump administration, and it focuses on the strategies pursued by both powers to rise to the top (China) and to stay at the top (US). The international power structure is undergoing a change. There is a raging debate about China trying to supplant the existing hegemon (the US), and the US is trying to maintain its sole superpower status. This article aims to examine the change in the global economic and political structure and the policies pursued by President Trump in his second administration (2025-2028) and the countermeasures taken by China. It argues that China is trying to modernise its military, to be technologically self-sufficient, and to expand its influence to non-Western territories as a reaction to the U.S. tariffs and technology restrictions and the formation of alliances that have created an environment that fosters great-power competition rather than cooperation. The article delves deep into the economic, military, and technological dimensions of this competition. Theoretically, this article employs the power transition and coercive economic diplomacy frameworks to explain some of the key challenges, such as the supply-chain bifurcation, undersea naval rivalry, and semiconductor embargos that sour relations between the US and China. This article contends that collaboration between the US and China is imperative for tackling global challenges such as climate change, uncontrolled immigration, and raging violent conflicts—both within and between states.

**Key words:** China, Us, Trump 2.0, Economic Policies, Technological Supremacy, Taiwan, Artificial Intelligence

### **Introduction**

Two major players, i.e., the US and China, are locked in strategic competition, as both pursue divergent goals on the international stage. The strategic competition affects geoeconomic and geopolitical aspects of international politics. The US has declared China (and Russia) as a “revisionist power”—that is long term goal is to revise the international order to make it suitable to its national interests (The White House, 2017). It is also claimed that China has the capacity as well as the intent to bring about such a change (Blinken, 2022). According to a European leader, China has been pursuing a goal that is aimed at “a



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systemic change of the international order with China at its centre [...] China's positions in multilateral bodies show its determination to promote an alternative vision of the world order” (Leyen, 2023). Why does the West think like this.

The reason is that China’s growth in the last 40 years is phenomenal—from a poverty-stricken developing nation to a sufficiently developed and rich nation. It has caught the attention of world players. Beijing has been able to slowly but surely close the gap on capabilities with the United States through a high growth rate in its economy, investment in modernisation of its military and seeking superior technological advancements. The transition of this shift is a classical issue of the power balance: the stronger the up-and-coming one becomes, the more frightened the old hegemon is, creating the cycles of confrontation, suspicion, and the competition in strategies. For example, Thucydides has argued in his book, *The Peloponnesian War*, that “it was the rise of Athens and the fears that this instilled in Sparta that made the war inevitable” (Thucydides, 1972). The peculiar feature of the new stage of Sino-American rivalry is not only the rapidity of Chinese rise but readiness of Washington under President Trump’s second term to take bold economic and technological actions against Beijing, with attention to the impact of such measures. What it has led to is an even more fractured world order of tariffs, supply-chain realignments, technological decoupling, and a larger military competition in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific (Hart, 2025).

Although the first Trump administration (2017-2021) has set the scene for confrontation by imposing tariffs and confronting China on various fronts, Trump 2.0 has definitely upped the ante—both economically and strategically. Re-imposing tariffs, and renewing the export controls on high-tech equipment, and a re-emphasis on Indo-Pacific alliances are all signs of a fundamental change of American strategy. Such policies do not only limit the entry of China into important markets and technologies, but they also induce the acceleration of self-reliance and the search of other partners—both trade and strategic. To comprehend this confrontational politics between the US and China, it is necessary to engage in an integrated perspective that goes beyond changes in policies that happen day-to-day to the larger structural shifts in world politics (Fishman, 2025). It is apt to shine some light on the theoretical side of great-power politics.

### **Power Transition and Economic Statecraft: A Theoretical Understanding**

This conflict between China and the United States is best interpreted with the help of both the power-transition theory and the economic statecraft literature. Based on the works by Organski and other scholars, power-transition theory emphasizes that such periods when a rising power is close to becoming equal to the dominant hegemon are especially likely to lead to conflict. For power transition theorists, “shifts in the international distribution of power are often believed to create the conditions likely to lead to at least the most important wars” (Organski & Kugler, 1980). During the time of power transition, in twelve out of sixteen cases, war happened in the past (Allison, 2015). There is a strong likelihood of conflict-ridden relations between the US and China in the future if history is any guide. Some of the measures taken by the current US administration, such as tariffs, export restrictions and realignments of the armed forces, are not only defensive measures but offensive ones—to preserve American supremacy on the world stage.

The second layer of theoretical foundation is economic statecraft. Contrasting to the traditional military balancing, the economic statecraft is characterized by the application of trade policies, sanctions, investment limitations, and bans of technology to modify the strategic environment of a competitor. The use of tariffs and technology restrictions as a part of President Trump’s policies is indicative of a broader plan of action against China’s



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assertive role in world politics. There seems to be a realisation in Washington that bringing China to the international economic and political order has not led to the desired outcome (a liberal, democratic China), so a change in policies is long overdue. There is the assumption that the United States by increasing China cost and limiting its accessions to high-level inputs could slow the emergence of Beijing as a rival power. However, such an approach could lead to a different outcome—it could strengthen the nationalistic discourses and lead to self-reliance and innovation. Thus, strategic competition between the US and China is the logical outcome of the dynamics of power transition and economic statecraft.

### **The Evidence and Trends of China in Power Transition Economic Scale and Resilience**

The Chinese economy is the second largest economy in the world—both in nominal GDP and purchasing power parity (PPP). Although its growth rate dropped to a single-digit in the 2000s and even to lower numbers in the 2020s, yet the sheer magnitude of the Chinese economy provides it with colossal powers in terms of the impact on world trade and investment patterns. Through trade agreements, infrastructure projects as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and financial institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Beijing has cleverly spread its tentacles in Asia and in Africa as well as Latin America. The tariffs introduced by Trump 2.0 have been a short-term challenge for the Chinese exporters, but it has also fostered diversification. The Southeast Asian, Middle East, and African markets are also becoming the new targets of Chinese companies, whereas policymakers focus on the concept of the so-called dual circulation, i.e. the gradual replacement of external trade with internal production and the development of technologies (China Briefing, 2025).

### **China's Military Modernization and Strategic Posturing**

Pursuing one of the most intensive military modernization programs in modern history, Chinese military has grown with growth in the economy. The amount of defense expenditure has continued to grow substantially and a hefty budget has been allocated over the years for building of naval vessels, missile programs, space infrastructure and cyber capabilities. The People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) now has the largest fleet of naval ships in the world, backed by an expanding submarine force and the most modern anti-ship ballistic missiles—it thus rivals the U.S. naval fleet. The modernization program is an indication of the strategy of Beijing denying its rivals access to its near seas and expanding slowly into the larger Indo-Pacific. The policies of Trump 2.0—especially the solidifying of alliances and the establishment of U.S. military force in the region—have added momentum to the Chinese drive towards military capabilities so that any future conflict, and in particular one that involves Taiwan, would be made costly to Washington and its allies (Liang, et.al, 2025).

### **Technological Competition and Supply Chains**

Technology has turned out to be one of the key battlefields in the US-China strategic competition. In the case of Beijing, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, 5G, and quantum computing breakthroughs are not only about economic growth but also about making it national security foolproof and augmenting it national and international power. To protect itself from the U.S. tariff and export controls on advanced semiconductors and lithography equipment, China has begun a massive expansion of its local chip-making sector by investing billions in research and skill development (Allison, Yen, & Barbesino,



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2021). China is still lagging behind world leaders in the more advanced chip design; however, it is closing the gap quickly in the less advanced nodes, which are still very important for industrial production and military systems. Similarly, Beijing has been urging companies to shift supply networks to non-Western suppliers, which guarantee availability of raw materials and other technological supplies. This two-track strategy—domestic capacity-building and international diversification—emphasises the fact that China is keen on withstanding external pressures and continuing its rise in the field of technology.

### **The Second Trump Presidency: An Analysis of Policy Levers and Strategic Intent Tariffs and Trade Coercion**

'Tariff' is the buzzword in today's international politics. It has led to economic uncertainty across the globe. It is an unfortunate truth that tariff-based economic statecraft started with the change of government in the US. President Trump's second term in office kicked off with a spree of tariffs on almost every trade partner of the US.

It is also a fact that the scene for all this was set in Trump's first administration. Contrary to the previous waves of trade conflicts in 2018-2020 that focused on specific sets of goods, the new trade tariff regime applies to a wider range of imports, which include electronic, motor vehicle, and consumer products. Washington has practically re-engineered the cost structure of bilateral trade by increasing the rate of tariff to unprecedented levels, compelling multinational enterprises to rethink their dependence on Chinese manufacturing hubs (CFR, 2025). Three reasons were put forward for this course of action: to revive American jobs, to encourage indigenous production, and to eliminate trade deficits. There is, however, a strategic design behind these measures: to put roadblocks on the road to hegemony for China. Despite the immediate impacts of the weakening of Chinese exports to the U.S. in the short term, the long-term effects are more complicated, as numerous companies are moving their production to other states like Vietnam, Mexico, and India. This implies that the tariffs are less likely to bring back a substantial number of industries to the U.S., but they could affect China's manufacturing capacity in the near term—with potential for self-reliance in the long term (Durante, 2025).

### **Technology Controls and Export Restrictions**

Probably the most significant policy change of Trump 2.0 is the sphere of technology controls. The administration has added to previous export bans on semiconductors, high-tech lithography equipment, software used in artificial intelligence, and dual-use technologies. Such actions are not limited to U.S. companies but have extraterritorial effect on those companies outside the United States that use American intellectual property or equipment. Effectively, there is a worldwide effort going on to block or restrict access to cutting-edge technology, especially military technologies (Sujai Shivakumar, 2024). These controls are framed with the emphasis on national security threats, yet the overall purpose is to maintain technological leadership in America. The reaction of China has been two-fold: firstly, large-scale investment in local research and development and secondly, seeking alternative suppliers, especially in friendly or neutral states. The consequence is a further decoupling process where parallel ecosystems of innovation are now emerging with the U.S. and allies on one side and China, assisted by some parts of the Global South, on the other (Zhang, 2024).

### **Alliance-Building and Security Pacts**

There is an increased focus on alliance building under Trump 2.0. The key theatre is the



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Indo-Pacific. Although there are those who think the first Trump presidency failed at its alliances, the second term has witnessed an orchestrated attempt to rally regional allies against China.

Some efforts (including AUKUS, the Quad (consisting of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia), and increased defence alliances with the Philippines and South Korea) are parts of a broader security arrangement—with China as a target (Mix & Tupuola, 2025). Such alliances encompass not just joint military drills, but they also involve new technology transfer, infrastructure development, and cyber defence. In the case of Beijing, such actions are perceived as encircling, and it has strengthened its will to build asymmetric capabilities and counter the perceived containment. So, China is not sitting idly either. It is expanding its influence across continents through projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). There are always strategic designs behind such projects. The alliance form thereby introduces a military layer to the confrontation on an economic level, increasing the stakes of both the U.S. and China struggle.

### **Strategic Disruption: Mechanisms and Manifestations**

#### **Economic Bifurcation and Supply-Chain Realignment**

The bifurcation of the economy is one of the most apparent consequences of the policies of Trump 2.0. As a way of diversifying their exposure to U.S. relations with China, multinational corporations are increasingly adopting a China plus one strategy, moving some of their supply chain to Southeast Asia, South Asia, or Latin America. Although China still has unmatched infrastructure and labour advantages, the political uncertainty of excessive reliance on Chinese production has led to a surge of diversification. This is a partial victory for Washington, with the world economy less China-centric. But it is not so cheap: American consumers pay more, and businesses must pay the relocation costs. In the case of China, the challenge is also big. Loss of certain export markets and investment flows negatively impacts short-term growth; however, the process also attracts Beijing to further industrialise its domestic market via the model of dual circulation. With the passage of time, such a bifurcation makes interdependence less and strategic competition more likely to escalate rather than de-escalate (Ilan Vertinsky, 2023).

#### **Technological Decoupling and Arms-Race Dynamics**

The new strategic competition is centred around technology. With both China and the US cutting off access to advanced semiconductors and other technological tools, there are signs of a technological arms race. President Trump is considered more assertive in this regard. The reaction of Beijing has been the mobilisation of state resources, massive investment in domestic innovation, and the speeding up of such a programme as Made in China 2025. Export bans can reduce Chinese access to advanced chips in the short term, though in the long term there will be a focus on domestic production. Such a dynamic resembles Cold War trends, in which restricting access to technology would trigger countermeasures by the competitor to get the technology by whatever means, e.g., access to nuclear technology. The net effect of such efforts is a strategic competition: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and cyber capabilities are no longer viewed as commercial objects but as tools of national power (USCC, 2024).

#### **Military Competition, Forward Postures, and Taiwan Risk**

The U.S. and China military rivalry has now taken a more serious turn under Trump 2.0. Beijing is building more submarine power, missiles, and space capability, and Washington



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is building alliances and deploying advanced capabilities and presence in the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan is the most dangerous flashpoint. Trump 2.0 has taken a strong stand on Taipei by supporting arms sales, increasing high-level engagement, and renewing security guarantees to Taiwan. Beijing uses these actions to justify more militarisation. The Taiwan Strait poses the greatest risk of miscalculation. Military drills, air intrusions and naval operations can turn into escalation, as there exists a high level of mistrust between the parties involved. So, Taiwan is one of the most conflict-prone theatres, as the risk of strategic disruption has increased because of forward deployment of forces on both sides—the US and China (Mike Cherney, 2025).

### **Diplomatic Fragmentation and Regional Balancing**

Diplomatically, Trump 2.0's policies have created pressures on smaller and middle powers to take sides. While Washington insists that allies decouple from China in sensitive sectors, many states remain reluctant to sever ties with such a large economic partner. Countries in Southeast Asia, for example, prefer hedging strategies that maintain security links with the U.S. while continuing economic engagement with China. In the same manner, South Asian, African, and Latin American states accept Chinese investments with the Belt and Road Initiative despite the US or Western security alliances. This fracturing highlights a crucial dynamic, which is that instead of forming a unified anti-China alliance, Trump 2.0 puts its aggressors in awkward situations, causing them to hedge their policies instead of taking them directly. The more Washington pushes, the more Beijing seeks to exploit divisions, offering incentives to countries that resist U.S. demands (Ganchev, 2025).

### **Strategic Consequences and Risks**

#### **Increased Geopolitical Instability**

Economic, technological and military competition has exacerbated global instability. Both parties (the US and China) view the defensive actions of the other as offensive actions, and this poses a security dilemma, as there exists a trust deficit. Washington considers the military modernisation and aggressive diplomacy as signs of the expansionist ambitions of China, and Beijing considers the U.S. tariffs, alliances, and its security guarantees to Taiwan as containment efforts. This lack of trust undermines peaceful resolution of conflicts. Even benign situations such as exchanges between ships or trade issues can lead to escalations. The stability of the international system is thus more prone to flare-ups due to the trust deficit between great powers.

#### **Economic Costs and Global Spillovers**

The competition between Washington and Beijing is not limited to the two powers. Tariffs and decoupled supply chains affect international markets, increase prices and impinge the flow of investments. Those countries that rely on trade with either the US or China have to make difficult decisions (to choose either the US or China), and the multinational companies have to cope with the high costs of supply chain diversifications and restrictions. There is a risk of negative spillovers around the world, as global growth will surely be affected by the Sino-US geoeconomic, geopolitical, and geostrategic competition. Analysts warn of slow GDP growth for both powers. In this regard, the policies of Trump 2.0 can affect China economically—at the expense of the world economy—thus damaging the credibility of the liberal economic order.

#### **Acceleration of Chinese Self-Reliance and Alternate Alignments**

On the contrary, coercive economic statecraft can push China towards self-reliance.



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Chinese leaders are in a position to mobilise local support for indigenous production by portraying the U.S. economic measures as aggressive and China-specific. Meanwhile, Beijing has strengthened its economic relations with non-Western bloc countries, building closer relations with Russia, the Middle East, and the African states. These alignments build parallel trade and investment networks—outside the influence of the West—so disintegrate the world into competing blocs. For the United States, this outcome undermines the long-term efficacy of its policy as China becomes less susceptible to pressures from the West.

### **Policy Implications and Options**

#### **For the United States**

For Washington, the difficulty is to strike the right balance between responsible economic statecraft and safeguarding its national interest. Tariffs and export controls can hardly stop the rise of China. A better long-term solution would be a mix of more focused domestic innovation and investment in infrastructure. Also, the U.S. should not overexert allies by asking them to completely decouple since clear decoupling is well-nigh impossible and unpopular in many countries. Instead, a selective decoupling, in case of delicate areas, at the same time with lines of crisis communication open to Beijing, could reduce the dangers of escalation—without losing its superiority. Simply put, developing mutual understanding and putting in place conflict resolution mechanisms will greatly help the peace and prosperity of the world, as the lethality of weapons has rendered hot war extremely destructive—if not impossible.

#### **For China**

China needs not to overreact to the foreign and economic policy measures of Washington. Military modernisation and self-reliance are logical responses to the pressure of the U.S.; however, any unreasonable military build-up will justify Washington's anti-China narrative and persuade China's neighbours to join it—for protection from China's expansionist designs. In order to further develop, Beijing has to take steps in sync with the international community. Diplomatically, China can showcase the BRI (as an economic connectivity measure) and participation in international bodies as steps to make its rise less threatening and thereby allow Beijing more room to manoeuvre.

#### **For the Middle Powers**

It is a tricky time for middle powers, as neutrality seems to be a difficult choice. So, they have to pursue hedging strategies. Diversification of trading partners, ensuring the sustainability of the supply chain, and safeguarding of technological sovereignty (access to modern technologies) are key to their survival and progress. Countries such as Japan, India and the European Union can play a role by promoting multilateral mechanisms that can lead to a less polarised world. Balancing relations with both superpowers is the safest option for smaller states. Joining any of the blocs could prove more harmful in the long run, as great powers pursue their own agendas, not necessarily in the interests of smaller states (Kara, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Deep-seated mistrust, trade uncertainty, and not-so-subtle strategic posturing are the hallmarks of the US-China competition. The imposition of punitive tariffs and counter tariffs, the use of blanket technology prohibition, and competitive bloc formation have exacerbated the already fractured relations between the US and China. The rise of China—



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with its intention and capacity to restructure the international economic and political order—and the US's efforts to retain its leadership have resulted in a zero-sum game, with serious repercussions for the economy, technological development, and the security of Asia and the world at large.

Economically, the decoupling, which has started under Trump 2.0, has precipitated a bifurcation of the supply chain and investment flows at a frightening speed. Tariffs and export controls have caused multinational companies to rethink their excessive reliance on Chinese production and have generated a process of China-plus-one, which disperses production across different locations in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Latin America. Although these factors have had immediate effects on Beijing, including reduced export earnings, capital outflow in certain industries, and increased production costs, they have also strongly encouraged internal consumption of the Chinese market as part of the dual circulation model. China is preparing the ground towards long-term resilience by focusing on internal demand and technological independence. Ironically, the same instruments meant to decelerate Beijing development can help it become more self-sustaining in its innovations, as it will be less dependent on the U.S. over the years.

The technological dimension of the Sino-US competition is not promising either. There happens to be a high-stakes technological arms race going on between the US and China in key areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing, to name a few. History is replete with examples that show that denying access to technology has led to undesired outcomes. For example, during the Cold War, putting restrictions on technology pushed the Soviet Union to develop its own capabilities. The U.S. technology controls are driving China's ambition to become self-reliant. This could change the technological governance and standards in the world in the next decade—with a parallel ecosystem of innovation, one focusing on the U.S. and its allies, and the other on China and parts of the Global South.

Trump 2.0 has heightened the security dilemma through the alliance-building in the Indo-Pacific, which is also militarily strong. Growing commitments to Taiwan, the deepening of AUKUS and the Quad, and the presence of high-end U.S. resources have made Beijing more or less feel encircled. To this, China has hastened its naval modernization, anti-access/area-denial capabilities, and strategic weapons. The Taiwan Strait is one of the key flashpoints. Frequent military drills, maritime patrols, and aerial incursions increase the possibility of accidents—with potential for flare-ups. The logic of mutual suspicion means that every defensive action of one side is considered an offensive action by the other one—thus the whole situation becomes extremely unstable.

Diplomatically, the plans of Trump 2.0 have brought both positive and negative results. As Washington has managed to lock in some of the alliances, it has also left many middle powers in hedging situations. Even as they strengthen security relationships with the United States, Southeast Asian states, India, the European Union, and African partners still maintain economic relationships with China. Beijing has been exploiting these divisions by offering economic favours, funding for infrastructure development, and other incentives to states that face pressure from the U.S. Thus, the new order turns out to be not quite bipolar, or even cooperative, but a complex mosaic of warring blocs and overlapping systems.

The U.S.-China rivalry in the international system has very far-reaching implications for the future of the liberal international order. In the case of fragmented trade networks, the struggle for technological supremacy, and militarised competition across the Indo-Pacific, this is a sign of the weakening of the cooperation-based liberal norms that have been in place since the end of World War II. Global crises such as wars, climate change, human



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trafficking, impending pandemics, etc., are pushed to the backburner, as Washington and Beijing are increasingly concerned with their status in the international hierarchy rather than with cooperation and collaboration on these shared challenges. There needs to be a mechanism whereby shared challenges are addressed through mutual cooperation; communication and collaboration are the only way forward—towards global peace and prosperity. Great powers need to lead by example; the rest will follow them—for the betterment of humanity.

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