

## Is the United States still the World's only Superpower: Implications for Pakistan's Foreign Policy

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### Abstract

*Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the international structure shifted from bipolar to unipolar. The United States was left as the world's sole superpower. No other country could even approach America in terms of military and economic might. Pakistan wisely allied itself with the United States and joined the global war on terror at America's request after the terrorist attack on New York City in 2001. As long as the United States maintains its dominant position, it is in Pakistan's interest to remain a close ally and thereby reap benefits in security, trade, investment and foreign assistance. The growth in the power and presence of rivals, including China and Russia, however, presents Islamabad with a fundamental decision, viz., to remain close to the United States or to develop stronger military, political and economic ties with nations aspiring to superpower status. This article examines the evidence on both sides of the question, concludes that America remains the world's only superpower and makes recommendations for Pakistan's foreign policy makers based on this finding.*

**Keywords:** Super-Power, European Empire, Economy, United States

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, many analysts have argued that the economic and military rise of Russia and China has challenged the long-standing status of the United States as the world's only superpower. China, with an 11 trillion dollar growing economy, seems to be an especially strong challenger.<sup>1</sup> If this assertion is true, the shift from a unipolar to a multipolar international system has profound implications for Pakistan's foreign policy. In a unipolar environment, nations do not need to choose sides since there is no great power conflict; in a world of multiple great powers, however, countries are forced to join one of the competing coalitions in order to obtain protection from the rival dominant powers.

As the evidence demonstrates, the predictions of America's decline are premature, and the international structure remains as it has been since the collapse of the Soviet Union, characterized by a single dominant power, the United States. Pakistan, therefore, risks losing the benefits of its traditional role as America's key ally in South Asia if it seeks an alliance with Russia or China motivated by a desire to balance American strength. Replacing America with Russia or China as the principal ally is also risky. Both countries suffer serious weaknesses as potential allies and competitors for global influence with the United States.

## **What is a Superpower?**

A superpower as "a country that has the capacity to project dominating power and influence anywhere in the world, and

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Adelman, "The United States Will Be the World's Lone Superpower for Decades to Come," *HuffPost*, April 10, 2017, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-united-states-will-remain-the-worlds-only-e4b081da6ad0064f> (accessed April 8, 2018).

sometimes, in more than one region of the globe at a time, and so may plausibly attain the status of global hegemony."<sup>2</sup> This state projects power on a global scale through several means, including military, economic, technological, cultural, and diplomatic.

The term “superpower” was first coined to describe the three great powers that emerged victorious in the Second World War— Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, however, Britain could have been described as the world’s sole superpower in the period 1815-1914.<sup>3</sup> England’s industrial revolution preceded that of America and other European states by several decades. As a result of its industrial prowess, Great Britain acquired superior economic, military, and diplomatic power that allowed it to achieve global hegemony, symbolized by the size and range of the British navy and merchant fleet and the role of the British pound as the standard of exchange in the international economy. Britain established a chain of bases and strategic strongpoints along the principal trade routes. Its chief rivals, France, Germany and Russia, could not overcome Britain’s advantages and its global hegemony.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century race among European powers to establish colonies in Africa and Asia, motivated by the need to find markets for manufactured goods and sources of raw materials for the manufacturers, Britain emerged victorious. The need for expansion was motivated by a Second Industrial Revolution after 1870 that produced cheap consumer products in massive quantities. Britain

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<sup>2</sup>Lyman Miller, “China an Emerging Superpower?,” *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 61, no. 1 (Winter 2005), [https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03\\_miller.html](https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03_miller.html) (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>3</sup>“The Age of Imperialism (1870–1914),” <https://www.tamaqua.k12.pa.us/cms/lib07/PA01000119/Centricity/Domain/119/TheAgeofImperialism.pdf> (accessed April 8, 2018).

dominated the globe not only politically but also in science, technology, and industrial production, as evidenced by its leading position in the development of the railroad, the internal combustion engine, and electrical power generation. Britain's industrial prowess was showcased for the world to admire in the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London.<sup>4</sup>

The empire on which the sun never set was accidental, in that British statesman, seeking trade and opportunities for investment, did not initially seek to control territory. The instability of these undeveloped regions, however, forced British hands and led to the building of the largest European empire. The goal of the founders of the English East India Company, chartered in 1600, was to exploit trade between London merchants and East Asia, Southeast Asia and India. The company's motives were entirely commercial, but necessity led its leaders to exert political control over its trading partners, and this control became the foundation of the British Empire in Asia. The British mercantile class sought to trade with and invest in the entire world and built the largest fleet of merchant ships ever known. The weakness of the emerging states in Latin America, Africa and Asia and the lack of international order, however, exposed these ships to peril and resulted in the deployment across the seven seas of the largest navy ever known to protect the oceans' trade routes. At the onset of the Second World War in 1939, the Royal Navy, still the biggest in the world, consisted of more 1,400 vessels, including seven aircraft carriers (with five more under construction), 15 battleships and battle cruisers (with five more under construction), 66 cruisers (with 23 more under construction), 184 destroyers (with 52 under

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<sup>4</sup>"Importance of the Great Exhibition of 1851," *UK Essays*, November 2013, <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/architecture/the-importance-of-the-great-exhibition-1851.php> (accessed April 15, 2018).

construction, 45 escort and patrol vessels (with nine under construction) and 60 submarines (with 9 under construction).<sup>5</sup>

### **America Replaces Britain as the World's Hegemon**

The end of the war, however, marked the beginning of the rapid decline of Great Britain as a major power. The moment of loss of superpower status is 1956, when the United States refused to support London's effort to reclaim the Suez Canal from seizure by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. British decline meant that only two superpowers remained the United States and the Soviet Union, whose conflict during the Cold War dominated world affairs.

America, in fact, assumed, in many respects, the mission of the British Empire after 1945. Just as the London merchants had sought to trade with the world, U.S. manufacturers sought to export to global markets and import raw materials, and U.S. banks looked for opportunities to finance international intercourse and invest in foreign markets.

### ***America's Role in Building the Global Economic and Trading System***

The United States led the establishment of international diplomatic and financial institutions at the Bretton Woods Conference, attended by 44 nations that met in July 1944 in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. The delegates agreed to set up a rules-based international monetary system and established two new institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

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<sup>5</sup>"British and Commonwealth Navies at the Beginning and End of World War 2," *Naval-History.Net*, last modified on August 7, 2011, <http://www.naval-history.net/WW2CampaignRoyalNavy.html> (accessed April 10, 2018).

U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt shared the belief of former President Woodrow Wilson that free trade promoted both international peace and prosperity. As a result of America's leadership, international markets became more transparent and were governed by rules to ensure fairness and openness.

These principles worked, and the years following the establishment of the Bretton Woods system witnessed a sustained economic boom. The United States, Soviet Union and the countries of Western Europe and East Asia all experienced a sustained high level of growth including substantial increases in employment. One of the keys to this sustained recovery from the devastation of the Second World War was the Marshall Plan for the rebuilding of Europe. In 1948 alone, the United States provided more than \$12 billion to Western Europe. One of the plan's principles was promotion of free trade through international cooperation, which resulted in the European Coal and Steel Community (1952), the foundation for the European Union (1993).<sup>6</sup>

In 2000, the IMF identified four basic aspects of globalization: trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration and movement of people, and the dissemination of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The logic of economic globalization is the process of increasing economic integration between countries, leading to the emergence of a global marketplace or a single world market. Even with the success of the Bretton Woods system and the economic boom that followed the Second World War, American

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<sup>6</sup>"The history of the European Union," *European Union*, last modified on January 25, 2019, <https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history> (accessed April 10, 2018).

<sup>7</sup>"Globalization: Threats or Opportunity," *International Monetary Fund*, 12 April, 2000, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200to.htm> (accessed April 20, 2018).

manufacturers and banks did not have access to much of the world's land mass and population, which was under the control of Marxist regimes led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and People's Republic of China (PRC). The economic reforms initiated by Chinese president Deng Xiaopeng in 1978 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, allowed many more countries to join the global economy. China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 and the Russian Federation in 2012. With Russia's accession, the international trading system came to embrace nearly the entire globe.

Economic liberalization was accompanied by political reform. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall came a surge in the number of democracies. In 1974, nearly three-quarters of all countries were dictatorships; by 2008 more than half were democracies.<sup>8</sup> The liberal democratic state fueled by a market economy became the world's preferred regime. Marxism and fascism had been discredited by the failings of Nazi Germany, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and Soviet Russia. The unprecedented growth in the global economy was facilitated by America's ability to project power anywhere in the world to protect the trade routes formerly secured by the British navy. This Pax Americana was made possible by the enormous and dominant power of the United States.

The Chinese economy has prospered due to access to the global economy (trade and investment). U.S. merchandise exports to China grew from \$22 billion in 2002 to \$116 billion in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Henry Holt and company, 2008), 171-180.

<sup>9</sup>Jon Talton, "China's 15 years in the WTO: assessing the costs, benefits," *Seattle Times*, January 31, 2017,

<https://www.seattletimes.com/business/economy/chinas-15-years-in-the-wto-assessing-the-costs-benefits/> (accessed June 2, 2018).

Pakistan, China and Russia all have a strong interest in the health of the international financial, monetary and trading system, undergirded by the Pax Americana.

Just like Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States used its dominant position in the world in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> to promote worldwide peace and prosperity. America continues to play this role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The claim that America remains the world's sole superpower is based on its global dominance in multiple areas, including military, economic, technological, cultural and diplomatic.

## **America: Still the Sole Superpower**

### ***Military Dominance***

The United States is the dominant military power in the world and has been since the end of the Second World War. After 75 years, America's military superiority remains unrivaled. The United States accounts for 37% of global military expenditure, spending more than twice what China, the world's second largest spender, does-- \$610 billion compared to less than \$250 billion. Russia spends less than one-eighth what America spends on the military, about 66 billion dollars. The American navy, with 11 aircraft carriers, has over 100 bases and ports abroad. By contrast, Russia has a weak navy with one aircraft carrier and less than a dozen overseas ports. China also has a single aircraft carrier and only a few overseas ports.<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. dominates across land, sea, air and space. The American military has been almost constantly at war since 1941, fighting the Second World War and smaller subsequent wars in Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq. With the exception of a disastrous war with Vietnam in the 1970s and one with India in

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<sup>10</sup>Op.cit., Adelman (2017).



1962, China's military has been largely idle. Russia's combat troops have been slightly more active, with engagements in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. Russia and China did fight a border skirmish in 1969. The United States has demonstrated in both actual conflicts and war games with its allies an ability to project military force in multiple locations around the world simultaneously. The nuclear strength of the United States deterred war with the Soviet Union and sheltered Japan and Western Europe under a nuclear umbrella that gave them the space they needed to grow some of the leading economies of the world.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, American military might is enhanced by that of its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, three of whom, France, United Kingdom and Germany, are among the ten greatest spenders on defense.

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<sup>11</sup>Ian Bremmer, "These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower," *Time*, May 28, 2015, <http://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/> (accessed June 6, 2018).

**Table 1: Military Spending, 2017, Top Ten Countries, in Billions of US Dollars**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Military Spending</b>	<b>Percent of US Spending</b>
United States	610	100%
China	228	37%
Saudi Arabia	69	11%
Russia	66	11%
India	64	10%
France	58	10%
United Kingdom	47	8%
Japan	45	7%
Germany	44	7%
South Korea	39	6%
Brazil	29	5%

Source: "The 15 countries with the highest military spending worldwide in 2017 (in billion U.S. dollars)," *Statista: The Statistics Portal*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262742/countries-with-the-highest-military-spending> (accessed June 7, 2018).

With regard to weapons systems, the number of American aircraft carriers dwarfs those of all other nations. These gigantic ships, with their hundreds of sophisticated combat aircraft and missiles, are one of the major means for projecting American force anywhere on the globe. With regard to nuclear warheads, Russia and the United States are in a class by themselves, with Russia having a slight edge in quantity and the U.S. in quality.

**Table 2: Number of Nuclear Weapons, 2018, Country Wise**

Country	Nuclear Warheads
United States	6,550
France	300
United Kingdom	215
Russia	6,850
India	135
China	280
Pakistan	145
Israel	80
North Korea	15

Source: "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," Arms Control Association, June 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat> (accessed June 10, 2018).

### ***Economic Dominance***

America's military might is matched by its economic prowess. The United States remains the wealthiest nation in the world. Although China's economy has been growing at an impressive rate since the economic reform of 1978, per capita gross domestic product lags far behind that of the United States. GDP per capita in the US was \$62,152 in 2018; in China it was just \$10,088. China's economy is hampered by massive state-owned enterprises which tend to be inefficient, while the U.S. economy is powered by private businesses. The average citizen in America benefits from the growth of the economy, while massive poverty, especially in the rural areas, persists in China.<sup>12</sup>

The American economy, moreover, remains the foundation of the global financial system. More than 8 out of 10 of all financial

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<sup>12</sup>Ian Bremmer, "These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower," *Time*, May 28, 2015, <http://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/> (accessed February 11, 2019).

transactions worldwide are conducted in dollars, as are 87% of foreign currency market transactions.

**Table 3: World Ten Wealthiest Nations, 2018, Projected, by Gross Domestic Product, Billions of USD**

Country	Gross Domestic Product	Percent of US Economy	GDP per capita
United States	20,413	100%	62,152
China	14,093	69%	10,088
Japan	5,167	25%	40,849
Germany	4,212	21%	50,842
United Kingdom	2,936	14%	44,177
France	2,925	14%	44,934
India	2,848	14%	2,135
Italy	2,182	11%	35,914
Brazil	2,139	11%	10,224
Canada	1,799	9%	48,466

Source: Statistics Times, "Projected GDP Ranking (2018-2023)," *International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2018, <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-ranking.php> (accessed June 9, 2018).

The United States has a growing population, fueled by immigration. The population grew from four million in 1790 to more than 325 million in 2018. Russia and China, by contrast, have or will have soon shrinking populations, with large numbers immigrating to other countries, including the United States. More than ten million Russians have migrated to other countries since 1991, and one quarter of Russians admit to thinking of emigrating. Recently, Russia has averaged a decline of 700,000 people per year. It is expected that beginning in 2023 China's population will also begin to decline, due to a low birth rate and emigration. A recent

Chinese poll showed that 62% of rich people want to move to other countries.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Technological Dominance***

The United States is the world's leader in technology and innovation, leadership symbolized by the size and impact of Silicon Valley in California. Eight of the top nine technology companies in the world are based in the United States. The valuation of companies such as Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook are greater than the gross domestic product of many countries. America's research universities and scientific institutions are the world's best. The United States boasts the largest number of Nobel Prize winners. One third of all research and development dollars are spent in the United States. American investors are the largest single source of global venture capital. The spirit of innovation explains in large part why the United States is home to over half of the largest companies in the world.

The Russian high technology sector, by contrast, is small and undeveloped, and China's relies on copying American innovations. Strong universities have been vital to America's technological edge. Almost three quarters of the world's best universities are located in the United States. By contrast, less than one percent of the world's top 500 universities are in Russia and two percent of the top 100 universities are in China.<sup>14</sup> American domination of the technology sector has changed the way the world works and is in no danger of being curtailed anytime soon.

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<sup>13</sup>Xin Haiguang, "China's 'Wealth Drain': New Signs That Rich Chinese Are Set on Emigrating," *Economic Observer/World Crunch*, June 11, 2011, <https://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2077139,00.html> (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>14</sup>Op.cit., Adelman (2017).

### ***Cultural Dominance***

Since the First World War, with the spread of American ragtime music and Hollywood movies, American popular culture has come to dominate the world, to the point that some nations, including France and Canada, fear that it is damaging their own national cultures.<sup>15</sup> No matter where one travels across continents, one confronts American music, films, dress, consumer products, and fast food chains. Even France, known for being protective of its national culture, hosts a Euro Disney theme park. In the 1950s many nations began to imitate America's consumer economy and sought to make the American lifestyle accessible to the masses.<sup>16</sup>

The English language is one of the most powerful vectors of American culture. American English has supplanted British English as the global lingua franca and is spoken by an estimated two billion people. Today, close to 70% of all native English speakers are American. American television, films, songs, computer games and websites have spread American English throughout the world. American dominance in these media is due to many factors, including the size of the U.S. domestic market, which provides incentives for their production and makes possible their export at affordable prices. The United States has a domestic market of over 300 million and a potential global market of more than two billion English speakers. The personal computer and worldwide web were American innovations that have accelerated the spread of American cultural influence. What all these cultural products have in common is that they are made for the average consumer and

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<sup>15</sup>"America's Cultural Role in the World Today," last modified 28 July, 2008, <https://accessinternationalvg2.cappelendamm.no/c951212/artikkel/vis.html?tid=385685> (accessed June 11, 2018).

<sup>16</sup>Ian Bremmer, "These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower," *Time*, May 28, 2015, <http://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/> (accessed February 11, 2019).

appeal to a universal audience. For example, two thirds of the movies shown in Europe are American while less than five percent of those shown in the United States are European. In a typical year, all top twenty grossing films in the world are American.

American authors, such as Stephen King, Anne Tyler, Michael Crichton, Jacqueline Susann, John Grisham, Toni Morrison, Dan Brown and Alice Walker, dominate popular literature around the world, in both English and translation. American popular music--ragtime, blues, jazz, swing, country western, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, hip-hop and rap--have swept across the globe. In the 1950s and 60s New York City came to rival Paris as a hub for modern art and American artists, including Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol who came to symbolize the international Pop Art movement. The postwar years have demonstrated that American popular culture, appealing as it does to mass tastes, is an exportable commodity in demand across the globe.

### ***Diplomatic Dominance***

Undoubtedly, the hegemony of the United States in global affairs cannot be supported without the strong pillar of the U.S.-led alliances that have held control of crucial areas worldwide since the end of World War II. The United States has strong allies in Europe (England, France, Germany, Italy), the Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) and Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia). The strength of America's alliances is illustrated by reaction to President Donald Trump's decision to launch missile strikes on a Syrian airbase in April 2017 in retaliation for the use of chemical weapons against insurgents by Syrian forces

that killed an estimated 86 people, including 27 children.<sup>17</sup> The countries that announced their support for the U.S. strike were Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, New Zealand, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom. Opposed were China, Indonesia, Iran, Russia and Syria.

### ***Soft-Power Influence***

In addition to hard military power, America also exercises “soft power,” the ability to attract rather than coerce. The currency of soft power is lifestyle and political principles. The universal attraction of the American way of life and the democratic principles on which the American polity is based are strong pulls, especially in the developing world. Key to American success are the institutions of democracy, capitalism and the rule of law. The United States has the world’s oldest written constitution and one of the most stable regimes, with presidential elections taking place every four years since 1788.

Joseph Nye coined the term in a 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. In this book, he wrote: “when one country gets other countries to want what it wants-might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.” He further developed the concept in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.<sup>18</sup> America excels in its ability to exert soft power. The 2016/17 Monocle Soft Power Survey ranks

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<sup>17</sup>Jane Onyanga-Omara, “U.S. allies praise Trump's strikes on a Syria airbase,” *USA Today*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/04/07/us-allies-praise-trumps-strikes-syrian-airbase/100161498/> (accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>18</sup>Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 26-46.



the United States as the leading country in soft power. The Elcano Global Presence Report scores the United States first among sovereign states.<sup>19</sup>

China, on the other hand, has a huge soft power deficit, given the weak appeal of its political system.<sup>20</sup> Russia also has little appeal to those aspiring to a better life. Russia and China remain politically authoritarian with state-run economies and weak legal and judicial systems. The Russian and Chinese states, moreover, suffer from widespread corruption.

Interestingly, the Chinese leadership understands the importance of soft power in the Information Age. In 2011, Xi Jinping, the incoming General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, devoted a whole plenary session at the party congress to the issue of culture. The final conference communiqué declared that it was a national goal to "build our country into a socialist cultural superpower."<sup>21</sup> And in 2014, Xi announced, "We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's messages to the world."<sup>22</sup>

An effective tool of soft power is foreign assistance, and here the United States is also a leader. In 2013, the U.S. provided \$32.7 billion in financial assistance; second was the United Kingdom at

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<sup>19</sup>"Real Instituto Elcano", *Elcano Global Presence Report 2015*, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/f36b5f004830c24a8e3b8fe0dd72d861/Global\\_Presence\\_2015.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/f36b5f004830c24a8e3b8fe0dd72d861/Global_Presence_2015.pdf?MOD=AJPERES) (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>20</sup>Jospeh S. Nye, Jr., "China's Soft Power Deficit: To catch up, its politics must unleash the many talents of its civil society." *The Wall Street Journal Opinion*, May 8, 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1842> (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>21</sup>"The red carpet, China's film industry," *The Economist*, December 21, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/news/c-red-carpet> (accessed August 12, 2018).

<sup>22</sup>David Shambaugh, "China's Soft-power Push," *Foreign Affairs*, June 6, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-s-soft-power-push> (accessed August 12, 2018).

\$19 billion.<sup>23</sup> An indicator of the effectiveness of soft power is the number of people seeking to migrate to a country. Almost 50 million people living in the U.S. today were born in a foreign country. That is more than four times higher than the next highest country. For many people around the world, America remains the ideal place to start a new life.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 4: Countries Hosting the Largest Numbers of International Migrants, 2017**

<b>International Ranking</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Migrants (Millions)</b>
1.	USA	49.8
2.	Saudi Arabia	12.2
3.	Germany	12.2
4.	Russian Federation	11.7
12.	India	5.2
18.	Pakistan	3.4

Source: International Migration Report 2017", *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/docs/MigrationReport2017> (accessed February 11, 2019).

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Bremmer, "These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower," *Time*, May 28, 2015, <http://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/> (accessed February 12, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> "International Migration Report 2017", *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration> (accessed February 11, 2019).

**Table 5: Largest Countries of Origin of International Migrants, 2017**

1.	India	16.6
2.	Mexico	13.0
3.	Russian Federation	10.6
4.	China	10.0
5.	Bangladesh	7.5
6.	Syrian Arab Republic	6.9
7.	Pakistan	6.0

Source: International Migration Report 2017", *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017> (accessed February 11, 2019).

### **The Trump Administration and the International Cooperation Agenda**

Some of America's allies have questioned the degree of commitment by U.S. President Donald Trump, elected in November 2016, to the Bretton Woods system and its principles of free trade, based on rules made and enforced by international organizations. During the election campaign and following his inauguration in January 2017, Trump criticized the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other trade deals, which he claimed were unfair to the United States. He withdrew the United States from the process of establishing a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and re-negotiated NAFTA with Canada and Mexico. In further blows to free trade and international institutions, Trump introduced punitive tariffs on imported steel and aluminum and openly attacked the system of global trade that has been in place since the end of World War II. "The WTO has been a disaster for this country," he said in March 2018 before imposing the punitive tariffs. Trump has also threatened the European Union and Germany especially, with automobile tariffs and has slapped \$50 billion worth of duties on Chinese goods while threatening additional tariffs worth \$200 to 400 billion more.

It is important, however, to place the president's hostile rhetoric and actions in the context of his desire to appeal to his electoral base. In the November 2016 election, Trump, the Republican Party's candidate, received fewer popular votes than his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. He won because of the electoral college, which gives a disproportionate weight to the fifty states. He narrowly carried the traditionally Democratic states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin because of the fears of industrial workers, many of whom had lost jobs when manufacturing plants closed. Although automation was the largest single cause of the de-industrialization of the American Midwest, Trump won votes by blaming the factory closings on unfair foreign competition.

If one looks more closely at the President's cabinet, however, there is much evidence that American commitment to the international trading system remains strong. In July 2018, for example, U.S. Secretary of State James Mattis stated that the United States remains 100 percent committed to the NATO alliance.<sup>25</sup> Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stressed that America's goal in its trade war with China is to force China to conduct trade in accordance with the rule of law, the key principle of the international trading system. Pompeo justified the pressure that the United States was placing on its trade partners by pointing out that the United States seeks the elimination of all obstacles to trade, including non-tariff barriers. America's partners, he said, "need to accept our vegetables, our beef, our fruit, our machine products. These are non-tariff barriers that ought not to exist if free

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<sup>25</sup>Richard Sisk, "US '100 Percent' Committed to NATO, Mattis Says," *Military.com*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/07/12/us-100-percent-committed-nato-mattis-says.html> (accessed August 20, 2018).

and fair trade is to be achieved.”<sup>26</sup> President’s Trump’s belligerent statements on the unfairness of many current trade agreements, thus, can best be understood as a continuing commitment to the principle of free trade based on rules enforced by international institutions accompanied by an insistence that the agreements themselves be fair to the United States and give American producers access to markets that have long been closed to them. Trump’s tough negotiating style is consistent with the teachings in his book, *The Art of the Deal*.<sup>27</sup>

### **Why China and Russia Are Not Superpowers**

By all measures of international power, China has a long way to go to rival the power in international affairs of the United States in the manner that the Soviet Union did.<sup>28</sup> A high percentage of the wealthiest Chinese are leaving the country, causing a wealth drain and a loss in tax revenue and investment. A large portion of the Chinese economy, about 30 percent of total assets, is still owned by the state. State ownership is associated with corruption, inefficiency and lack of innovation.<sup>29</sup> China’s high-tech sector cannot compete with that of Japan, the European Union and the United States. The Chinese socialist state faces increasing difficulty in generating sufficient revenue to maintain the large subsidies

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<sup>26</sup>Joel Gehrke, “Mike Pompeo to G-7 trade critics: ‘It’s a simple moral principle’,” *Washington Examiner*, June 18, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com> (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>27</sup>Donald J. Trump, with Tony Schwartz, *Trump: The Art of the Deal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2015), 45-54.

<sup>28</sup>Lyman Miller, “China an Emerging Superpower?,” *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2005), [https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03\\_miller.html](https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03_miller.html) (accessed February 11, 2019).

<sup>29</sup>Gao Xu, “State-owned enterprises in China: How big are they?,” *The World Bank*, January 19, 2010, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/state-owned-enterprises-in-china-how-big-are-they> (accessed February 11, 2019).

needed to placate an aging population.<sup>30</sup> The one-party state lacks the will to reduce the government's power and liberalize the economy, steps needed for Chinese industry to be globally competitive. The Chinese military lags behind the U.S. military in terms of equipment and training. It is especially difficult for the Chinese armed forces to access new technology. The military is subject to meddling by the Chinese Communist Party and lacks combat experience.<sup>31</sup>

China can make a claim that it is stronger than Russia and, therefore, more deserving of superpower status. China is a far wealthier nation than Russia. The People's Republic of China has a gross domestic product of 12 trillion dollars compared to 1.5 trillion for the Russian Federation. It spends \$228 billion on its military, compared to \$66 billion for Russia.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, Russia has a stronger case than China to be considered a superpower. It is self-sufficient in natural resources, including huge energy reserves; it has a substantial space program; it has world-class scientists and mathematicians; it surpasses both China and the United States in number of nuclear warheads; and it has aspirations to be a global leader. The Kremlin has displayed a willingness to intervene militarily in both Europe and the Middle East, including the countries of Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. Russia's

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<sup>30</sup>Sean Cowan, "Top 10 Reasons China Won't Be The World's Next Superpower," *Listverse*, September 6, 2017, <http://listverse.com/2017/09/06/top-10-reasons-china-wont-be-the-worlds-next-superpower/> (accessed April 04, 2018).

<sup>31</sup>Michael S. Chase et al., "China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)", *RAND*, February 11, 2015, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ChinaIncompleteMilitary%20Transformation2.11.15.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2018).

<sup>32</sup>Wes Frank, "Has China become stronger than Russia in military power?", *Quora*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/Has-China-become-stronger-than-Russia-in-military-power> (accessed April 10, 2018).

energy exports remain high. In 2017, Gazprom generated total revenue of \$104 billion. Gazprom controls 35% of Europe's energy market, control that gives Russia political influence over Central and Western Europe. In 2017, Russian arms exports were worth \$17 billion, second in value only to the arms sales of the United States. In Europe, Russia is the single largest defense spender and purchaser of major combat systems.<sup>33</sup>

Russia's economy, however, is not intertwined with the American economy as is China's and, therefore, lacks the capacity for rapid growth. Russia lacks the economic strength to be a global leader and is vulnerable to retaliation from Washington. The Russia has suffered a great deal from the sanctions imposed by the United States and its NATO allies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. The United States and its NATO allies evicted Russia from the G7 and imposed sanctions that have had a measurable harmful impact on the Russian economy and the Putin's ability to maintain political support through the distribution of wealth. America's ability to weaken economies through sanctions is proven not only by the case of Russia but also that of Iran. By the end of 2017, Russia's GDP was almost two percentage points lower because of the cumulative effect of sanctions on capital inflows. The Kremlin was forced to take austerity measures, including raising the retirement age and increasing the Value-Added Tax (VAT).

Both Russia and China, moreover, lack soft power and do not offer an alternative to Western liberal democracy based on a free-

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<sup>33</sup>Alexey D. Muraviev, "Russia not so much a (re)rising superpower as a skilled strategic spoiler," *The Conversation*, February 19, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/russia-not-so-much-a-re-rising-superpower-as-a-skilled-strategic-spoiler> (accessed February 11, 2019).

market economy. The Cold War was a struggle between two political and economic systems striving to win the hearts and minds of people around the globe. The triumph of democracy in 1991, however, meant the end of history, i.e., the end of ideological struggles.<sup>34</sup> Both Russia and China, although possessing national wealth and growing militaries, lack all the elements needed to qualify as superpowers. As large authoritarian states, they face the threat to stability that comes with struggles over succession to power and regional separatist movements.<sup>35</sup>

### **Implications for U.S.-Pakistan Relations**

#### *The Limits of China and Russia as Allies*

To make a wise choice, Pakistan must assess the relative advantages and risks of an alliance with either, the United States, Russia or China. China has difficult and sometimes hostile relations with a number of countries, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, India, South Korea and the United States. Several of these conflicts stem from China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. If Pakistan is perceived as too close to China it risks alienating these important Asia-Pacific countries. On the other hand, through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is making allies with a number of countries, including Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is also tying Pakistan to China. Based on the experience of other nations participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, however, Pakistan must be careful not

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<sup>34</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 201-255.

<sup>35</sup>Erik Khzmalyan and Armen Sahakyan, "Russia and China Aren't Full Allies—Yet: And here's what Washington can do to keep it that way," *The National Interest*, October 4, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russia-and-chinaarentfullallies%E2%80%94yet-32637?page=0%2C1> (accessed April 04, 2018).



to undertake unsustainable debt while China reaps the benefits.<sup>36</sup> It is estimated that Pakistan would be required to repay principal and interest of approximately \$3.5 billion per year over a period of 20 years.<sup>37</sup> There is also concern that the debt could give China leverage over Pakistan's sovereignty, including its foreign policy.<sup>38</sup>

Russia, like China, has few allies, including Serbia, Cuba and Syria, and difficult relations with many countries, including the United States and the member states of the European Union. Russia has historically been a strong ally of India. In 2017 India was the largest purchaser of powerful, sophisticated weapons from Russia, with purchases totaling \$1.9 billion. India purchased two Russian A-50eh1 AWACs in 2017, and has purchased MiG-29SMTs, as well as light and transport helicopters, some of which were delivered in 2017. In 2012, India purchased 42 Russian Su-30MK fighter jets for \$1.6 billion, 25 of which were delivered in 2016 and 2017. India has purchased nearly 1,000 T-90 tanks in the last few years from Russia. India also selected five Russian S-400 missile defense systems for \$5 billion in 2017. It also selected an Akula class Type 971 submarine.<sup>39</sup> This powerful arsenal poses a major threat to Pakistan.

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<sup>36</sup>K. S. Venkatachalam, "Can Pakistan Afford CPEC?", *The Diplomat*, June 16, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/can-pakistan-afford-cpec/> (accessed April 05, 2018).

<sup>37</sup>Ilaria Maria Sala, "Pakistan's new government is trying to walk back from alarming Chinese debt", *Quartz*, September 10, 2018, <https://qz.com/1384295/pakistan-is-trying-to-back-away-from-a-debt-trap-with-china/> (accessed April 05, 2018).

<sup>38</sup>S. Akbar Zaidi, "Has China taken over Pakistan?," *The News*, June 18, 2017, <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/china-taken-pakistan-cpec/#.W9c9o5MzZhE> (accessed April 05, 2018).

<sup>39</sup>Daniel Brown, "The top 10 countries that bought Russia's most powerful weapons in 2017," *Business Insider*, October 06, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com> (accessed April 07, 2018).

### ***Why a Superpower Makes a Good Ally***

While prosperous democracies such as Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan have chosen to ally themselves with the United States, aspiring great powers Russia and China have not. What advantages do the superpower's friends obtain and what costs do its rivals pay? The first benefit is defense. America's enormous military might shield its allies from attack. Article 5 of the NATO treaty says that each member state will treat an attack on another member as an attack on itself. The NATO states and Japan are so dependent on the American nuclear umbrella that they spend relatively little on their own militaries. American presidents have tried to cajole and coerce them into spending at least two percent of their GDP on defense but with little success.

The second benefit is peace, enforced by American military might. There have been no wars between the world's major powers since 1945, a state that has allowed America's allies to focus on economic growth and building welfare states--achievements that have resulted in a relatively content citizenry enjoying a high standard of living.<sup>40</sup> A unipolar world is even safer than the bipolar system that characterized the Cold War. Proxy wars fought indirectly between the Soviet Union and the United States in places such as Korea, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan ended with the collapse of the USSR. The former client states of the Soviet Union have rushed to join both NATO and the European Union to reap the benefits of the Pax Americana.

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<sup>40</sup>“Does the world benefit from having a single superpower?,” *Debates wise organization*, <https://debate.wise.org/debates/2920-single-superpower-benefit-of/#yes1> (accessed April 07, 2018).

America's wealth and international presence provide the means to support democratic movements in autocratic states and to provide foreign assistance to developing countries. It is a blessing to the world if the dominant nation supports the struggle for human rights, opposes the proliferation of nuclear weapons and leads the fight against terrorism. America's strength and commitment to principles led it to intervene, along with its allies, in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya and is currently working to stifle the development of atomic weapons in Iran and North Korea.

As September 11, 2001, demonstrated, many non-state actors are hostile to peace and security. America serves as a powerful leader to direct the global war on terror. Fragile states, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, need a protector to prevent them collapsing under pressure from extremist groups. America shoulders the burden of military intervention to protect human rights and leads the formation of coalitions to protect them when most individual countries would be reluctant to take action. During the Cold War, the United States was compelled to support dictatorships that were anti-Communist but in the current unipolar environment America is freer to encourage democratic reforms across the globe. Development assistance, led by the generous example of the United States, is no longer a tool in the Cold War but can be tailored to help developing countries achieve greater peace, stability, democracy and prosperity.

## **Conclusion**

In a multipolar or bipolar international system, the competing superpowers need allies in order to strengthen their position relative to their superpower rivals. During the Cold War, for example, the United States and the Soviet Union used a variety of

means, including coercion and economic assistance, to entice as many nations as possible to join its coalition. The American bloc consisted of such associations as NATO and the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). A key organization in the Soviet bloc was the Warsaw Pact. Pakistan chose to join the American bloc and India the Russian. The change from a bipolar to a unipolar environment following the collapse of the USSR, however, greatly reduced America's need for allies since it could affect its will by exercising its dominant military and economic power without worrying about threats to its security and prosperity. Nations, no longer courted by the superpower, nevertheless have an incentive to seek its good will, given its hegemony. Pakistan, thus, chose to ally itself with the United States after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, in the global war on terror. If, however, Russia and China have reached superpower status, Pakistan is in a much different position. It will be courted by each of them as well as the United States to join its bloc.

If, however, as the evidence above demonstrates, America remains the world's hegemonic power, Pakistan will have an incentive to earn the military and economic support of the United States even if the effort leads to friction with Russia and China. The trade-off of an alliance with the world's most powerful nation in exchange for lost opportunities in its relationship with Russia and China is a rational choice. A concrete manifestation of this pro-American policy would be for Pakistan to cooperate fully with U.S. efforts to defeat terrorism in Afghanistan and help bring about reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Taliban.<sup>41</sup> The realities of uni-polarity explain both the Trump administration's

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<sup>41</sup>Aakanksha Nehra, "US-Pakistan relations under the Trump Administration," *The Pioneer*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2018/columnists/us-pakistan-relations-under-the-trump-administration.html> (accessed February 11, 2019).

South Asia policy, with its pressure on Pakistan not to provide safe haven for Afghan insurgents, and its trade policy, which is based on criticisms of long-time American allies, including Canada, Mexico and Germany, for taking unfair advantage of the United States in past trade deals. During the Cold War, U.S. allies had to make few sacrifices to qualify for American bounty, but in the current unipolar environment, these same nations have to make a much greater effort to obtain and maintain economic and military assistance. Pakistan, for example, must show concrete results in helping to end the war in Afghanistan, while Canada and Mexico must make concessions regarding revisions to the North America Free Trade Agreement. Just as it is in the interest of Pakistan to examine its relationship with China in the light of future U.S. aid and access, it behooves India to view its ties to Russia through the American lens. Procurement of supplies for its nuclear weapons from China and Russia by Pakistan and India, respectively, for example, risks retaliation from Washington.

Pakistan is at a crossroads in its foreign policy. If it chooses to become a close ally with China and scale back its ties to the United States, it risks becoming like North Korea, which is saddled with heavy debts from its long alliance with China and isolated from the West. By choosing America, Pakistan will be positioned to benefit both economically and militarily and to play a central role in the resolution of the long-running conflict in Afghanistan.