

Twigging the US-China Competition from the Lens of Offensive Realism: Implications for Nepal

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Abstract

What are the implications of ongoing US-China competition on the entire global system and particularly to strategically-placed countries like Nepal? The United States has been voicing its growing displeasure against China's rise. The United States regards China's military modernization and economic growth as evidence that it will not be a status quo power. In this scenario, there is a widespread belief that great power is inherently offensive, that the quest for power never ends, and that China will maintain the status quo posture until it achieves power parity with the United States. As a result, the United States has shifted its policy toward the Asia-Pacific region and is forming strategic alliances to counterbalance China. It is argued that if there were no legacies of friendship and ideological proximity, a great power fall or power transition from a dominant nation to a challenger almost always results in a cold war or

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major war. The U.S. and China have cultural and ideological differences; however, China has integrated many aspects of the existing international order and its global norms. In this background, this article examines fundamental assumptions of offensive realism and the nature of the U.S.-China rivalry, as well as the meaning of China's rise and the U.S.-China greater power competition for Nepal. This phenomenon will be tested through offensive realism and how it amounts to great power behavior.

Introduction

General academic literature on great powers takes no less time to assume that great-power countries and their interactions have the potential to shape international politics and influence the global system. As such, there are two fundamental questions: firstly, how many great powers can be identified in different international systems characterized by multipolarity, bipolarity, or even unipolarity? Secondly, what is the extent and potentiality of the identified great power? The cycle of great power's rise and fall continues throughout history, and it occurs approximately every 120 years according to the theory of long cycles (Pop & Grigoras, 2018). The multipolar world system emerged after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century and continued until the 19th century. It was characterized by the existence of multiple great powers, each with its sphere of influence and competing interests (Gills & Frank, 1993). Likewise, the bipolar world system emerged after World War II, with the United States and the Soviet Union emerging as the two rival superpowers. This system was characterized by global competition for supremacy, and it was known as the Cold War (Rogov, 1993). Similarly, the unipolar world system emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with the United States becoming the sole superpower (Wohlforth, 1999). This is the first time in recorded history that we have had a unipolar system. This system was characterized by the dominance of U.S. political, economic, and military power around the world. The United States took a leading role in global affairs and often acted unilaterally to pursue its interests. Today, the global system is in transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. During this shift of the balance of power towards multipolarity, the U.S. is still considered the most powerful state, followed by China, Russia, and India. On the other hand, there is a strategic bipolarity between the U.S. and China

(Loke, 2023). Thus, China is very close to the U.S.; it surpassed the U.S. in 2014 in PPP terms, and it is the second-largest economy in nominal terms. In addition to that, it has been forming parallel multilateral institutions and an alternative worldview. Apart from that, it has been rapidly exporting its development model around the world (Bello, 2023).

In this reality, according to Mearsheimer, if China continues to rise for thirty years, like in the past thirty years, its rise will not be peaceful at all. So, the real threat to the U.S. is China, which has the potential to become more powerful than the U.S. (Carlson, 2023). Based on his theory, he predicts that China's rise will be marked by hegemonic and aggressive behavior, inevitably leading to a major conflict between China and the U.S. (Alenezi, 2020). Thus, China is pursuing a more multipolar world order and aiming to become an advanced socialist country by 2049. Therefore, the most contentious question is how powerful the U.S. will be relative to China, Russia, and India in this multipolar world. How will the U.S. behave toward its peer competitors, especially China? In this scenario, this article intends to test the nature of the U.S.-China rivalry through the lens of offensive realism, and what does China's rise mean for Nepal what are the implications if the U.S.-China great power rivalry continues? To discover answers to the same, this study relies on qualitative method for analyzing the secondary data gathered from reliable books, journal articles, and some authentic websites. Deductive methods and explorative research techniques have been used to analyze the data and phenomenon from the realist perspective, with a specific focus on offensive realism.

Offensive Realism and Great Power Politics

Can China rise peacefully? This is the topic of the final chapter of John Mearsheimer's "Great Power Politics". According to Mearsheimer, China's rise won't be peaceful because, while it continues to rise economically, it will translate its economic might into military might (Modebadze, 2020). To Mearsheimer, international politics is a zero-sum game. As such, if the U.S. gains, China loses; if the United States loses, China gains. He further argues that China will emulate the U.S. and try to dominate Asia the way the U.S. dominates the Western Hemisphere. It aims to be the most powerful state in Asia and push the U.S. out of it (Mearsheimer, 2014). Mearsheimer's analysis is based on five theoretical assumptions: firstly, states are

the key actors in the international system, and they act as an anarchical system. Secondly, all states have some offensive military capabilities, and some have a lot. Thirdly, it is impossible to know the intentions of other states. Fourthly, survival is the principal goal of states. Fifthly, states are rational actors; they act strategically in pursuit of their goals (Steinsson, 2014). Thus, based on this theory, states pursue numerous goals, but in an anarchical system, survival is unavoidable. Similarly, states are always in a state of security dilemma because although their material capabilities can be measured, their intentions may not be known. Consequently, there surfaces uncertainty in international politics, and great powers continue their military race. Against the same backdrop, it is very hard to say what China's intentions will be in 2025 toward the US and vice versa (Mearsheimer, 2014). Therefore, the realist school argues that great powers seek to accumulate more power than their neighbors and rivals. That is, according to Mearsheimer, the best way to survive, in an anarchical milieu.

While realists consider the international system anarchical, the components of fear, self-help, and power maximization remain the major concerns of great power. Because their rival states may have significant military capability, and also it is difficult to comprehend their true intentions. Equally, if states get into trouble, there is no higher authority to decide. Therefore, the more powerful a state is, the less likely it is to be impacted by numerous forms of rivalries. As a result, a great power has two ultimate goals; the first is to become a regional hegemon. Second, make sure, no other country dominates its region; in other words, prevent peer competitors from achieving regional hegemony (Modebadze, 2020). In the same way, greater power matters to regions of its peer competitor and their neighborhood or next door because of their potential threat. Furthermore, they always attract critical resources like oil, uranium, etc. because resources are means to acquire power (Lkenberry, 2008).

In consequence, the U.S. pursued regional hegemony from 1783 and until the end of the nineteenth century, it secured that position. Similarly, the U.S. strictly followed the Monroe Doctrine, which involved pushing the European great powers out of the Western Hemisphere and made sure no European or Asian great power would come back (Prifti, 2017). Today, while the U.S. is deeply involved politically,

economically, and militarily all over the world, John Mearsheimer perceives China's rise as the most immediate threat to U.S. supremacy. According to Mearsheimer, China qualifies as a great power. A great power's behavior has a revisionist trait, where it would not be satisfied with the status quo and would always be striving to readjust that power balance to its advantage until it became the most dominant power in the system (Wohlforth, 2009). This rationale suggests that as China ascends, it will assert itself as a revisionist power, aspiring to achieve hegemony.

The offensive realists further argue that regional hegemons naturally aim for global hegemony; thus, as an increasingly powerful China tries to dominate Asia, China's next move may be to push the U.S. out of Asia (Khan, 2023). Therefore, according to this theory, China's rise poses the greatest and gravest threat to the U.S. in the twenty-first century. Similarly, the U.S. believes that Chinese President Xi Jinping has made a grand entrance with full preparation to fill the gap between superpower rivals; thus, the U.S. considers China a real peer competitor. As such, the U.S. leaves no stone unturned to prevent China from becoming a regional hegemon. That's why the U.S. has shifted its policy towards the Asia-Pacific and launched different strategic initiatives to counterbalance China. The U.S. intends China to remain occupied with security concerns in its own region. Because, if China manages to come out of the security threats in Asia, it will be free to roam all over the world like the U.S. (Mearsheimer, 2021). There have been the cases how the US dismantled its four potential peer competitors in the twentieth century: Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union. Thus, the U.S. is applying the same strategic approach toward China (Dicicco & Onea, 2023), whose foreign policy behavior, however, tells a different story.

China's Foreign Policy Behavior

China's foreign policy behavior under Mao Zedong (1949–1976) was to topple all imperialist governments throughout Asia and the world. It had actively supported communist revolutions in developing nations. China actively propagated its socialist ideology abroad, seeking to influence other countries through diplomatic, economic, and cultural channels, aiming to expand its sphere of ideological influence beyond its borders. However, following the Ping-Pong diplomacy and the Nixon-Mao rapprochement of 1971, China was drawn closer to the Western camp. Then China

tempered its rhetoric of revolution; additionally, it didn't aid insurgencies in other nations (Wang, 2021). China followed Deng Xiaoping's path "Tao Guang Yang Hui," which means "to keep a low profile and bide its time while getting something accomplished". Further, China established peaceful development and prioritized coexistence from a philosophical standpoint. Also, the U.S. and China mutually developed the spirit of interdependence. Further, the U.S. helped China join the WTO and opened its market to Chinese products.

China's membership in the WTO in 2001 is a testament to its support for free trade, which helps expand China's global trade. Thus, Beijing's economic partnership expands to Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa, and so on. Likewise, China rapidly integrated Western-led institutions and reaped the benefits of the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and so forth (Ikenberry, 2008). Alastair Johnston considers China's compliance with most of the global norms; these include sovereignty, free trade, non-proliferation and arms control, national self-determination, international treaties, etc. (Johnston, 2003). Similarly, over the years, China has also managed to resolve border issues with many neighboring countries and has not been involved in a war for forty years (Jalil, 2019). The fact that China can attract its neighbors means that they are increasingly viewing China as less of a threat (Jalil, 2019).

On the other hand, some critics argue that, since 2013, after the 'bold' entry of Chinese President Xi Jinping into the competition, the certainties of the so-called 'unipolar world' became blurred. China was no longer comfortable with concentrating only on its internal affairs and started to abandon the motto of "keeping a low profile", as it sought to project its power outside its borders, as the great power does (Mahadevan & Nugroho, 2019). Today, China has been rapidly modernizing its military strength, and its military expenditure is ranked second after the U.S. Besides military developments, China has also increased naval patrols (Jalil, 2019) along with construction of aircraft carriers and cutting-edge stealth fighters, as well as the establishment of overseas military bases, beginning with one in Djibouti (Pop & Brinza, 2017). Some contend that China is resolute in its ambition to establish itself as a naval force possessing a blue-water navy, a critical characteristic of major global powers. In the same way, China regularly engages in a

military confrontation with India at its border, and it has threatened Taiwan against moves for independence and deployed missiles on the mainland as well. As a result, the Taiwan issue and regular border confrontation with India are seen by Western Powers as China's non-status quo endeavors (Balasubramaniam & Murugesan, 2020). Another perspective is that China has been promoting alternative world views through the 'Global Development Initiative,' "Global Security Initiative' and 'Global Civilization Initiative'. A further argument is that China has defined itself as a defender of sovereignty for weak countries, a pioneer of development, a promoter of good governance, and a promoter of world peace. In the same way, China's most ambitious initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative, BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the 'Boao Forum for Asia," are seen as parallel institutions to break down the U.S.-led international institution (Groitl, 2023). Thus, China's foreign policy behavior has been gauged in two parallel scenarios: first, largely integrate into the current international system to balance the U.S., and second, create a multipolar world order (Johnston, 2003), shaping the narratives of great power rivalry.

US-China Great Power Rivalry

Currently, under the fifth generation of communist leadership, China is heading toward global supremacy. Thus, in recent years, "the rise of China," and "global power shift" have become eye-catching headlines of media coverage. So, due to China's rise, numerous ramifications are perceptible in the global system (Xing & Bernal-Meza, 2022). Thus, arguments are being framed that the U.S.-led "unipolar world" would not last long and predictions are being made that an eventual transition either to a multipolar world with China being one of the power centers or a change of guard with China at the helm (Lai, 2011). To A.F.K. Organski, "China will become the most powerful, but the question is how long it will take to achieve this status" (Organski 1958). However, some analysts argue the period of power transition has already begun, which caused the amendment of the Chinese Constitution to abolish the term limits of its president. Thus, experts say China has entered a phase of relative parity of power (Degterev et al., 2021).

During the Soviet period, China was ten times weaker than the U.S. While the global GNP of the US was 25% China had 2.2%. But it was an absolute miracle

that by 2014, China had risen to the top of the PPP rankings (Nye, 2023). During the Cold War, the U.S. allied with China to contain the USSR; however, China converted it into an opportunity and learned best practices from Western science and technology, took advantage of trade expansion, and so on (Bello, 2023). This unexpected growth has made China a real peer competitor of the U.S. Nonetheless, greater power has two goals: first, to become a regional hegemon, and second, to prevent peer competitors. In this scenario, the U.S. campaign to avert China's rise doesn't fall. However, the U.S. is still in a trial-and-error phase to prevent China from becoming a regional hegemon. Thus, to counter China, the U.S. has been involved in intense security competition with China through the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Quad, and Aukus. Similarly, to slow down China's rise, the U.S. has launched a trade war, arms race, technological competition, and space race. In 1979, the U.S. de-recognized Taiwan; however, now its policy is rapidly changing (Somers, 2023). The U.S. has regularly weaponized Taiwan, and since the speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in 2022, more tension has risen. There is no civilized communication, and the situation seems like a new cold war (Keegan & Churchman, 2023). Therefore, it is argued that the South China Sea and Taiwan issues may act as a war trigger in U.S.-China relations, as seen through the power transition angle.

At the same time, some critics argue that Chinese challenges are very different from those of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union did not have the same prospects and economy as China. On the other hand, the Chinese Party is unlike Lenin's, which wants to establish the superiority of its ideology (Kim & Kim, 2022). Critics further argue that China is integrated and willing to work within the existing, western-led systems, and it is not an outsider to this order (Pop, 2017). Also, China has not been involved in a war in the last 40 years. To support this logic, Kishwor Mahbubani says it is not appropriate to apply a Cold War strategy. He further argues that Chinese leaders are motivated by the memory of humiliation from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century when the greater powers of Europe and Japan all exploited China (Mahbubani, 2022). Taiwan is the last symbol of humiliation (Mahbubani, 2022). Thus, Chinese people simply want no more humiliation. As a result, the Chinese understand that there are no other options for becoming the most powerful. This pursuit intensifies, fueling determination to

ascend to the zenith of power, driven by the imperative of reclaiming dignity and status on the global stage.

Ambitious Challenger vs. Displeased Hegemon

The U.S. has started to weave a narrative globally, particularly among its allies that Chinese President Xi Jinping is a tough leader, who follows an aggressive foreign policy to replace the existing U.S. supremacy. Thus, the U.S. feels a threat against the current global order and its worldview shaped by the US values and interests (Zhou, 2022). As a result, the U.S.-China rivalry creates a situation like the Cold War. The American dissatisfaction is the cause of China's relative parity in wealth, military capacity, trade, technology, and the space race (Xu & Liu, 2022). Similarly, China's formation of parallel multilateral institutions, creation of alternative world views, and promotion of its development model have aggravated further tensions. On the other hand, the United States had hardly endured its rivals, historically. Thus, as a response to, the U.S. first announced the "Pivot to Asia" policy of the Obama administration in 2011, and, second, the Trump administration declared the significance of the Indo-Pacific strategy to the US and its allies. Now, with Joe Biden at the helm, American policy toward China echoes the same. Further, the U.S. has taken counterbalancing initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) (Xu & Liu, 2022). Despite having Quad and Aukus, the U.S. is active in expanding NATO+ in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, the emerging hegemon China and the established hegemon United States compete in a variety of formats, such as the formation of new alliances or checking each other's influence in the region (Flint & Zhu, 2019).

The United States, as reported, desires a rule-based international order, whose major elements are pronounced as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Mattej & Nader, 2008). Thus, the long-term goal of engaging with China was that, over time, economic development in China would bring about political changes and eventually turn China into a democratic state. By virtue of shared democratic values with the United States, China would be a friend to the US rather than a foe (Mearsheimer, 2019). However, China didn't turn into a democratic state. It's the realization developed by the US policymakers. Thus, the U.S. believes that China

took great advantage of the current Western-led system, but it didn't accept the values of democracy and rule-based international order. Thus, the U.S. considers China to be the single largest roadblock to this U.S. mission. China, however, holds a different view. Chinese leaders argue that democracy is not the panacea for international problems; ideological conflict is only a smokescreen. The real problem is competition for global supremacy (Schweller & Pu, 2011).

In fact, in the twentieth century, ideology was the center of great power competition; however, in today's world, trade, technology, and space competition are at the center. Thus, the Chinese policymakers assert that even if China were to become a democracy tomorrow, the United States would still have problems with China because the United States, in President Obama's words, does not accept second place. Further, Donald Trump also popularized the slogan "America First" as his policy (Skonieczny, 2018). Consequently, the U.S.-China rivalry has resulted in spillover effects, polarizing world politics with few characteristics from the days of the Cold War. In these circumstances, the U.S. is aggressively engaging to influence China's neighbors. On the other hand, China is trying to push American power away from its neighbors (Xing & Bernal-Meza, 2022). A similar situation was experienced by the Nepali policymakers during the ratification of the MCC Compact. Whilst China wanted Nepal to join its GSI and GCI, the U.S. wanted Nepal to be a member of the SPP (which couldn't be materialized later) revealing how the U.S.-China competition will continue to create further strategic space in Nepal (The Kathmandu Post, 2022).

What Does China's Rise Mean for Nepal?

Nepal's northern neighbor, China, has the oldest civilization and a big market. It has been making miraculous progress from the days of Mao Zedong to the current leadership of Xi Jinping. China achieved an impressive average gross national product (GNP) growth rate of nine percent from 1978 to 1993 (Smil, 1993). It has become one of the world's largest trading nations, enabling it to increase outward foreign direct investment. Similarly, massive industrialization has succeeded in boosting China's economy while amassing vast holdings of foreign reserves. China holds the second position globally in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), trailing only behind the U.S. This economic prowess has facilitated the upliftment

of millions from poverty, underlining China's significant role in global economic dynamics and its impact on improving living standards for its populace (Zawaski, 2023).

Thus, China is knocking on Nepal's door with big opportunities to enhance connectivity and technology transfer. However, Nepal allegedly turns to China only at difficult times. After the 1989 embargo, Nepal swiftly forgot the strategic significance of China, and the same scenario manifested during another embargo in 2015. During the 2015 embargo, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed to buy fuel from China, similar to the facilities of transit and transportation agreements. However, the seven Chinese ports, which Nepal has accessed today, are yet to be utilized from the Nepali side. Similarly, in May 2017, Nepal and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on BRI (Murton, 2023). After Nepal signed up for China's Belt and Road Initiative, Nepal's government formed two committees led by foreign and finance secretaries to identify projects for negotiations with China. The finance secretary-led committee listed 35 projects to develop under this initiative. Later, the government of Nepal cut the number of proposed projects from 35 to nine at Beijing's request. But till now, no project under it has been concretely implemented (Sharma & Chhetri, 2022). Further, when Chinese President Xi Jinping came to Nepal in 2019, most of the agreements made had not taken off in a full-fledged manner. The most-hyped Kerung-Kathmandu railway connectivity has been pushed back.

In this situation, experts argue that most of the developing countries around the world are taking huge advantage of China's growth; why can't Nepal? They further argue that this is a crucial time to reap benefits, so Nepal should remain determined about maximizing the benefits. The BRI intends to connect regions through highways, rail routes, key ports, gas pipelines, and other infrastructure (Lahtinen, 2022). Thus, once Nepal and China begin capitalizing on the resources of the Himalayas, there will be immense changes in the development landscape. Therefore, trans-Himalayan cooperation may secure Nepal's position in the new regional economic order conditioned that the government provides diplomatic commitment and enhances cooperation in mutually beneficial areas.

Cooperation in the Trans-Himalayan region is not a new approach, however; during

the medieval era, Nepal not only had trade with Tibet and Bengal but was a vibrant hub that connected the lands in the north and south (Rose, 2023). The demand for Nepali goods in the northern Indian plains is recorded in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. The mobility and business between Kathmandu, Lhasa, and Calcutta are most repeated in the history books (Singh, 2009). Thus, the history of Sino-Nepal ties embraces the interface of civilization, culture, and economic activities (IFA, 2014). To revive these historical glories, China's BRI initiative is often referred to as an opportunity for Nepal to invest in trans-Himalayan infrastructure building. While China has the technology and capital, Nepal is often advised by Nepali and Chinese experts to grasp these opportunities to eventually "land link" China with the South Asian region, and free itself from the chains of landlocked-ness and buffer status.

But, in doing so, whether Nepal will be able to consider and be careful of not letting the expansion of connectivity be one-sided? And will the entry of a third country in the field of infrastructure be equally encouraged? Because, India has not joined China's BRI initiative and India manifests perpetual anxieties when Nepal and China launch any connectivity projects. In the meantime, the dimensions of US-China rivalry have been expressed variously. Whilst the overlapping strategic ambitions of the U.S., China, and India are reportedly at their peak, the nature of the rivalry between these three nations will fix the 21st century's new geopolitical and geo-economic order in Asia. These phenomena are sure to put Nepal's geopolitics on the global radar. As such, Nepal may need to carefully understand the emerging dynamics of its neighbors and closely and carefully assess emerging global geopolitical trends, growing economic contact between New Delhi and Beijing, shifting relations between India and the U.S., and America's Asia rebalancing policy. Against the same backdrop, the high-level visits from the US and China to Nepal in different periods since the Trump administration divulge interesting accounts in regards to diplomatic signaling in the geopolitically stretched environment.

The US High-Level Visit Nepal since Donald Trump Administration

- National Security Council official Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher arrived on Dec 6, 2023
- *USAID* Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Asia *Michael*

Schiffer arrived in *Kathmandu* on Dec 6, 2023

- Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the US-funded project Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Alice Albright, visited Nepal, on October 3, 2023.
- Senator Chris Van Hollen, a member of the US Senate Foreign Affairs and Appropriations Sub-Committee on State and Foreign Operations, arrived in Nepal on September 1, 2023.
- Cameron Alford, Vice President of the MCC's Compact Operations Department, arrived in Kathmandu ahead of the MCC's Entry into Force (EIF) on August 30, 2023.
- Donald Lu, the United States assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, made his third visit to Nepal for his one-day visit on July 14, 2023.
- The United States Undersecretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, under the Joe Biden administration, Uzra Zeya, came to Nepal on May 22, 2022.
- Samantha Power, the chief of the United States International Cooperation Agency USAID, was in Nepal on February 7, 2023.
- US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, who arrived in Kathmandu on a two-day official visit, met Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on January 30, 2023.
- Donald Lu, the United States assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs, made his second visit to Nepal on July 28, 2022.
- Anthony Flynn, commander of the US Army's Asia-Pacific Command, was in Nepal on June 9, 2022.
- The four-member US congressional delegation led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, including Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (Rhode Island), Cory Booker (New Jersey), Mark Kelly (Arizona), and Representative Mondaire Jones, visited Nepal on April 22, 2022.

- Donald Lu, the United States assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, made his first visit to Nepal on November 19, 2021.
- MCC's vice president, Fatema Z. Sumar, and deputy vice president, Johnathon Brooks, visited Nepal on September 9–12, 2021.
- Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, visited Nepal on January 11, 2019.
- Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia at the US Department of State, David J. Ranz, visited Nepal on May 15, 2019.
- Joseph H Felter, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for South and Southeast Asia, visited Nepal on, February 25, 2019.
- Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., Commander of the United States Pacific Command visited Nepal and participated in the opening ceremony of a US-sponsored multinational U.N. peacekeeping exercise (Shanti Prayas) in Kathmandu on March 20, 2017.
- Leading a bipartisan delegation of the US House of Representatives, US Congresswoman and former speaker of the House of Representatives, Ms. Nancy Pelosi, visited Nepal on May 6–7, 2017.
- A delegation from the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation visited Nepal in July 2017 to hold discussions over the final provisions of the planned MCC Compact.

China's High-Level Officials Visit to Nepal in Recent Year

- A delegation from the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China led by Vice Minister Sun Haiyan arrived in Kathmandu on January 27, 2024
- Visit of Li Zhanshu, outgoing chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China visited Nepal from September 12–14, 2022.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also the State Councilor of

China, visited Nepal from March 25–27, 2022.

- Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Mr. Li Zhanshu visited Nepal in September 2022.
- Head of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China, Liu Jianchao visited Nepal on June 10, 2022.
- Leading a four-member delegation, Guo Yezhou, vice-minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC), arrived in Nepal on December 27, 2020.
- State Councilor and Minister of National Defense Gen. Wei Fenghe visited Nepal in November 2020.
- Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China paid a state visit to Nepal on October 12–13, 2019.
- State Councilor and Foreign Minister. Mr. Wang Yi visited Nepal in September 2019.
- Governor of the Yunnan Province Mr. Ruan Chengfa visited Nepal in November 2019.

US-China Great Power Completion: Implications for Nepal

Although Nepal may have little significance in the world's politics on its own, it ironically offers considerable strategic leverage for others. Because Nepal's location connects the two land masses of India and China, it has a unique strategic status enjoyed by only a few countries worldwide (Uprety, 1991). Its location between the two rising, competing, and conflicting powers of Asia --China and India-- makes it important for Western powers to strike a strategic balancing act in the region (Ayadi, 2021). Due to the power transition from the U.S. to the Asia-Pacific region and the U.S.-China bipolar strategic rivalry, the U.S. is aggressively engaging to influence China's neighbors. On the other hand, China is pushing American power away from its neighbors (Xing & Bernal-Meza, 2022). In this situation, the U.S. strategic entry into Nepal and the intense rivalry between China's BRI and the U.S.' MCC projects are reflections of these two countries' growing competition in world

politics. These expressions amply reflect the attempts at geopolitical struggles and counter-struggles.

On the other hand, as offensive realists opine, to survive as great powers, they should be regional hegemons. Thus, China's foreign policy seems not to confine itself to its borders and maintains a low profile. Accordingly, China's proactive political and diplomatic engagement with Nepal has been increasing. China is also concerned about the United States' regular high-level visits and its concerns about the Indo-Pacific Strategic and State Partnership programs have been already reported by the press, and discussed by the Nepali politicians in the parliaments (Ford, 2020). China believes both the MCC and SPP initiatives are part of the U.S.'s broader strategy to counter China's influence in South Asia. So, to balance U.S. influence in Nepal, China is contagiously requesting Nepal join its GSI and GCI initiatives, which are also known as counter-initiatives to the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Strategic and Quadrilateral Initiatives (The Kathmandu Post, 2022). On the contrary, the U.S. believes China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not just an economic initiative, but also a geopolitical one. The BRI is part of China's broader strategy to expand its global influence. They further believe that one of the primary goals of the BRI is to export Chinese development and influence, particularly in the developing world (Hu, 2020). Thus, during the U.S.-China bipolar strategic rivalry, they are in a race to influence each other's regions.

In the meantime, Nepal's southern neighbor, India, is riled by China's increasing presence in Nepal. In addition to that, Sino-Indian conflict is reported on the Indian Ocean and the Himalayan border. Today, India and the U.S. are on the same side to contain China because India is a natural ally of the U.S. Furthermore, India believes that the U.S. is not working against its interests in South Asia (Shahzad & Khan, 2022). As a result, India is balancing cooperation with the U.S. Similar to that the U.S. considers India essential to its Indo-Pacific strategy to counterbalance or counterweigh China in the region. Additionally, India has not joined the BRI, and it has been blaming the BRI for violating its sovereignty in Kashmir and believes that the BRI has a "string of pearls" strategy (Gokhale, 2021). In the same way, in regard to India's foreign policy, almost all governments have embraced Nehru's Himalayan security policy (Feer, 1953). Thus, India, too, perceives that the rise of

China changes the status quo in the Himalayan regions. Although Nepal has joined the BRI project and further agreed to expand railway connectivity, India seems reluctant to welcome it, which will eventually be extended to India's northern parts. Whilst both India and the Western powers don't entertain China's strong presence in Nepal, over the last few years, the government of Nepal has been facing geopolitical pressure.

Conclusion

Great powers are major players in international politics, and they matter in shaping the international system. The American supremacy and worldview established after the Second World War went unchallenged for almost two decades after 1990. The basic foundation of the worldview was the final victory of liberalism and the narrative of "the end of history". However, now the world is rapidly moving from unipolarity to multipolarity, with strategic bipolarity between China and the U.S. The U.S.'s growing dissatisfaction with China is due to China's relative parity with the U.S. on wealth, military, technology, and space race, creating parallel multilateral institutions and alternative world views. Thus, this contrast between U.S. displeasure and Chinese ambition has created geopolitical and economic implications at global and regional levels, and their rivalry manifests as a "new cold war." In this scenario, it is widely believed that in an anarchical world system, great powers are always motivated to maximize their power. In this reality, the U.S. believes China is a revisionist power, and a rising China aims to become the ultimate hegemon. On the other hand, history shows that the U.S. didn't tolerate its peer competitors and its second position in the international system. Thus, to address this situation, United States has established various initiatives, such as the Indo-Pacific Strategic, Quad, Aukus, and NATO+, as counterbalancing measures to limit China's influence in the Asia-Pacific area. Furthermore, the U.S. has been putting pressure on its regional allies to take its side and adopt a more explicit position against China on various issues such as the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea disputes and Tibetan Refugees issues. Therefore, through the lens of the power transition, scholars argue, the U.S. and China will clash in Taiwan and the South China Sea. Similarly, Nepal's neighbors, India and China, can be seen as competitors on the border and in the Indian Ocean. In the meantime, India sees China's emergence as a challenge to its

status quo in the Himalayan regions and perceives development in the region as impacting its security interests. At the same time, the U.S. is enhancing stronger relations with India to counterbalance China in the region. Thus, both of them perceive China as a threat in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the other hand, China's strategic and security interests are largely related to security and peace in Tibet, while its economic interests are to expand its trade in South Asia by using Nepal as a "gateway" through its BRI connectivity projects. However, China's engagement with Nepal overlaps due to the U.S. strategic entry into Nepal and the intense competition over the MCC and BRI projects. Thus, this is a reflection of these two countries' growing competition in world politics, and it puts Nepal at the center of strategic calculations. Therefore, China's involvement in Nepal is aimed at maintaining equilibrium between India and Western countries, leveraging initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI), and Global Security Initiative (GSI). This is also known as the counterbalancing initiative against MCC and SPP. Thus, Nepal's location between the two rising, competing, and conflicting powers of Asia (China and India) makes it important for Western powers to strike a strategic balance in the region. Most importantly, while Nepal borders the U.S. competitor country China, on the one hand, and its strategic partner India, on the other, Nepal must tread strategically.

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