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## US-CHINA RIVALRY IN ASIA-PACIFIC: DIMENSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

**Rabia Akhtar**, Founding Director of the Centre for Security, Strategy and Policy Research at the University of Lahore

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The Asia-Pacific region, a critical arena for international politics due to its economic dynamism and strategic maritime routes, is currently witnessing an intensifying rivalry between the United States and China. This competition is reshaping the geopolitical landscape, influencing regional security, and affecting the global balance of power. The rivalry is multifaceted, encompassing trade, technology, military capabilities, and diplomatic relations with other states in the region, with several dimensions having broader implications for regional and global stability.

### Trade and Economic Dimensions

The economic aspect of the US-China rivalry is perhaps the most visible, characterized by a tense and sometimes confrontational trade relationship. The trade war initiated during the Trump administration, which saw both countries imposing tariffs on billions of dollars' worth of each other's goods, underscores the deep economic tensions. While there have been efforts to smooth over these issues, such as the Phase One trade deal signed in January 2020, fundamental disagreements over trade practices, access to markets, and intellectual property rights remain unresolved. These economic tensions are exacerbated by efforts to decouple key aspects of the two economies, particularly in technology and supply chains. The United States has expressed concerns about dependence on Chinese-manufactured goods and technology, citing national security risks. This has led to significant shifts, such as restrictions on Chinese technology firms and incentives for reshoring manufacturing capabilities to the United States or diversifying to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **Technology and Cybersecurity**

Technology is another critical front in the US-China rivalry. Both nations view technological superiority as essential to economic and military leadership in the 21st century. The United States has taken significant steps to curb the influence of Chinese technology companies, exemplified by actions against firms like Huawei and TikTok, which it accuses of posing national security threats. Conversely, China has been promoting its digital Silk Road and striving for technological self-reliance, as outlined in its “Made in China 2025” initiative. Cybersecurity is intertwined with these technological concerns, with both countries accusing each other of cyber espionage. The US has frequently charged China with stealing intellectual property to bolster its technological industries, a claim that has intensified mutual suspicions and fueled a cybersecurity arms race in the region.

## **Military Buildup and Strategic Posturing**

The military dimension of the US-China rivalry involves a significant buildup of capabilities and increased strategic posturing in the Asia-Pacific. The United States, through its alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, among others, maintains a substantial military presence in the region. This includes naval patrols in the South China Sea, intended to assert freedom of navigation in the face of expansive Chinese territorial claims. China, for its part, has rapidly expanded and modernized its military, particularly its navy and missile capabilities. The establishment of military outposts on artificial islands in the South China Sea and the frequent incursions into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone are seen as direct challenges to US influence and commitments in the region.

## **Support for Regional States**

The US-China rivalry in the Asia-Pacific has profound implications for countries in the region, especially India and Pakistan, shaping their strategic, economic, and diplomatic landscapes. For India, this rivalry presents an opportunity to enhance its strategic posture and economic ties with the US, positioning itself as a pivotal counterbalance to China in the region. While this alignment attracts investments and security assurances, it also risks escalating tensions with China, as evidenced by border disputes between the two nations. Conversely, Pakistan, leveraging its longstanding alliance with China, has seen strengthened economic and military support, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), defense procurements, and joint military hardware development plans. Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of Chinese military hardware, including fighter jets like the JF-17 Thunder, which is co-produced by both countries. This collaboration extends to tanks, surface-to-air missile systems, and naval vessels, including submarines. The US-China dynamics could intensify the strategic

calculus for both India and Pakistan, pushing them towards firmer alignments that could either stabilize or destabilize regional security architecture.

## The Uncertain Future

The US-China rivalry in the Asia-Pacific is a defining aspect of contemporary international relations, with profound implications for regional and global stability. The competition touches upon vital interests of both nations and involves a complex interplay of economic, technological, military, and diplomatic factors. As this rivalry evolves, it will continue to shape the strategic choices of countries in the Asia-Pacific and beyond, posing both challenges and opportunities for managing peaceful coexistence and cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world.

*The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.*

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