

Evolving World Environment under Global Competition

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Abstract

The end of Cold War ushered in an era of unipolarity that is now appearing to give way to a bipolarity in a new Cold War setting. The once self-proclaimed 'sole superpower', USA, is having a sobering realisation of the rise of a global challenger to its political, military, technological and economic hegemony. Considering the threat profile that humanity is confronted with, the profligate wastage of resources on non-productive activities is depriving the world of the much-needed funding to counter these common threats to humanity. The global community has understood the hollowness of the so-called 'rules-based order' promoted by the West which because of the politics of exclusion has alienated the rest of the world. The "rules-based disorder" that perpetuates the hegemony of the West and promotes the "Victors' Justice" in UN Security Council is no longer the preferred social contract for the international community. Multipolarity, therefore, is emerging as the dominant credo of the 21st century with minilateralism and multilateralism co-existing as a process that is ultimately leading towards a strengthened multilateralism, shaping a multipolar world. The world is moving away from bipolarity to multipolarity and the consequent transition is full of headwinds. The problems like the lack of appreciation of the tectonic shift in geo-politics, bloc politics' effort to stage a comeback, and the last-ditch efforts of a global hegemon to perpetuate its hegemony, stand in the way of a smooth embrace of multilateralism and geo-economics by the international community. There are signs that middle Powers like Brazil, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Japan are reviewing their options to

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embrace multilateralism based on mutually beneficial trade and economic partnerships. Muslim Middle Powers like Türkiye, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can play a major role in the coming decade. Pakistan, however, badly needs a 'Regional Reset' with its neighbours, a 'Healing Touch' at home, and scrupulous avoidance of getting embroiled in any new Great Game in the region.

Keywords: Bipolar, Unipolar, Cold War, Minilateralism, Multilateralism, United Nations, NATO, Middle Power

Introduction

The end of the Cold War ushered in an era of unipolarity that is now appearing to give way to bipolarity in a new Cold War setting. The possibilities inherent in the unipolar era are rapidly giving way to uncertainties and risks of global rivalry, couched in palatable terms such as competition. The once self-proclaimed ‘sole superpower,’ the USA, is having a sobering realisation of the rise of a global challenger to its political, military, technological, and economic hegemony. For the first time in centuries, a non-Western country has seriously challenged the scientific and technological dominance of the West and the growing realisation of the closing gap between the two is rankling with the cohort of USA led Western advanced industrial nations. Three fundamental shifts in the contemporary world order are apparent.

First, in the decline of the West and the concurrent rise of the Global South, *The Economist* aptly terming it that “it seems the (post World War II) liberal international order seems to be coming apart.”¹

Second, China’s phenomenal rise, particularly in advanced areas of science and technology, is a force multiplier in its quest to spearhead and spawn the emergence of an alternative world order. It is not based on the fading hegemony of the West. Harvard University issued a research report on “China versus the United States - The Great Tech Rivalry,” which noted that “China seems to be overtaking the US in hi-tech manufacturing, especially in Artificial Intelligence, 5G, robotics, cloud computing and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics).”² *The Economist*, in its cover story on 15 June 2024, called China ‘the scientific superpower,’ concluding that the ‘old science world order, dominated by

¹ “The Liberal International Order Is Slowly Coming Apart,” May 9, 2024, *The Economist*, accessed June 20, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/05/09/the-liberal-international-order-is-slowly-coming-apart>.

² Graham Allison et al., “The Great Tech Rivalry: China vs the U.S.,” 2021.

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America, Europe and Japan, is coming to an end.”³ *The Economist* cites some interesting facts in this regard: 40% of original research papers on AI are now emanating from China, with only 10% from the US and another 15% from Europe/UK. Out of the top 10 scientific research universities, six are in China; Tsinghua University, an Alma mater of President Xi Jinping, is the top university in the world in science and technology today. China’s spacecraft is the first to bring samples to Earth from the hard-to-reach side of the moon.

Third, the US and the West have already embarked on a new Cold War to ‘contain’ China and curtail its rise. NATO now labels China as a ‘threat’ and after the recent G7 Summit in Italy, The New York Times splashed its report of the Summit, titled, “China joins the G7’s List of Adversaries,” citing “28 references to China in the final communique, almost all of those describing Beijing as a malign force.”⁴

While the West, or, more precisely, the US Military Industrial Complex (MIC) prepares for a New Cold War against Russia and China, some of the problems that threaten the entire world and thus merit a global focus include climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, pandemics, economic inequality, terrorism, fake news and disinformation, and the misuse and abuse of AI.

The growing socio-economic inequality amongst the nations and the enervating impact of big power competition has spawned a new culture of minilateralism evidenced by alliances like QUAD, AUKUS, Middle East QUAD, and I2U2, at the cost of multilateral alliances like the United Nations and World Trade Organisation. Minilateralism, therefore, is fragmenting the world into isolated alliances that are eroding the global

³ “China Has Become a Scientific Superpower,” accessed June 20, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2024/06/12/china-has-become-a-scientific-superpower>.

⁴ “It’s Not Just Russia: China Joins the G7’s List of Adversaries - The New York Times,” accessed June 20, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/15/world/asia/g7-summit-china-russia.html>.

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capacity to mount a collective challenge to the emerging threats to humanity.

Great power competition is driving the world towards bloc politics, reminiscent of the Cold War era, with no realisation in the West that China is no Soviet Union. The baleful headwinds of geo-politics have again started to divide the world into rival camps despite the visible advantages of trade, connectivity, and mutually beneficial partnerships offered by geo-economics. Competing alliances like QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, the emerging trilateral alliance between Japan, South Korea, and the USA, and the “Chip Four” Alliance to counter China’s semi-conductor manufacturing capability are trying to alter the regional balance of power in Asia, Middle East, and Asia-Pacific. Deglobalisation is a new vehicle for the economic containment of the rivals. The elite clubs are getting more exclusive while democratisation of established institutions like the UN remains unrequited in a world that stands divided in the face of threats like disease, poverty, hunger, extremism, terrorism, and climate change.

The Middle Powers and Global South are facing difficult choices of balancing and band-wagoning in this competitive global milieu that warrants adroit handling of emerging geo-political challenges. The widening gulf between the Global North represented by G7 and G20 and the Global South represented by G77 presents the risks of economic marginalisation that obtrudes serious limitations on their security choices.⁵ One manifestation of the above is the increased economic and security pain being inflicted on the countries of the Global South due to conflicts in Europe like the Russo-Ukraine War.

The negotiation of the geo-political crossroads by the vulnerable nations facing myriad security challenges demands a better appreciation of the emerging international security challenges and a global vision leading to

⁵ Sarang Shidore, "Winning the Majority: A New U.S. Bargain with the Global South," Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, last modified August 31, 2023, <https://quincyinst.org/report/winning-the-majority-a-new-u-s-bargain-with-the-global-south>.

their solution. Considering the threat profile that humanity is confronted with, the profligate wastage of resources on non-productive activities is depriving the world of the much-needed funding to counter these common threats to humanity.⁶ There is a need to highlight the root causes of the conflict and disharmony that threaten global peace and stability. It is the failure of the arbiters of world peace to address the root causes of the conflicts that have resulted in conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, and festering disputes in Asia like Jammu and Kashmir and the Korean Peninsula.

In this unequal world, there are two contending models of inter-state relations at play. One is the geo-political model rooted in the Cold War era that depends on competing security-centered alliances like NATO, AUKUS and QUAD.⁷ This model seeks to contain the global rivals and relies on military muscle to seek geo-political advantages over the rivals. The resultant militarisation of the global commons like space, land and oceans fuels conflicts and friction between exclusive clubs and cliques of countries. The other model, different in approach and strategy, is the geo-economic centered model that relies upon economic partnerships, trade and connectivity to bind the community of nations in an inclusive and mutually beneficial economic relationship.⁸ Such a model promotes regional and global cooperation and connectivity instead of security alliances. Institutions like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) that promote regional peace and prosperity reflect this model. The positive role played in the mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia by China attests to the increasing importance of the economic factor that brings the countries together. Any model that privileges domination and exclusion, results in

⁶ Roy Calne, "Why, Too Many People? A World Program," *Population and Environment* 17, no. 2 (November 1995): 161–87.

⁷ Mikael Wigell, "Conceptualizing Regional Powers' Geoeconomic Strategies: Neo-Imperialism, Neo-Mercantilism, Hegemony, and Liberal Institutionalism," *Asia Europe Journal* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 135–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-015-0442-x>.

⁸ *The Political Economy of Geoeconomics: Europe in a Changing World*, International Political Economy Series (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-01968-5>.

wars and strife. We are watching the results of that model in the shape of two active conflicts in the world.

While China has invested over \$1 trillion in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),⁹ undoubtedly the most significant diplomatic and developmental initiative in the 21st Century, to bind the world in mutually beneficial trade and infrastructural connectivity, the USA has been busy funding wars like Russo-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts to the tune of \$77 billion¹⁰ and \$14.3 billion,¹¹ respectively. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza threaten to derail the global and regional connectivity promised by the geo-economic centered inter-state cooperation paradigm introduced by China. The European countries that are dependent on Russian gas are feeling famished of the economical energy resource promised by Nord Stream gas pipelines and other Russian energy conduits. Countries like Germany, France, and Italy are dependent on the Russian gas to the tune of 55%,¹² 17%,¹³ and 25%¹⁴ while East European nations like Hungary and Poland are dependent to the extent of 64% and 80%.¹⁵ Overall the EU

⁹ “Belt and Road Initiative: Is China’s Trillion-Dollar Gamble Worth It?,” *BBC*, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-67120726>.

¹⁰ Matthew McIntosh, “How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts.,” *Brewminate: A Bold Blend of News and Ideas* (blog), August 8, 2023, <https://brewminate.com/how-much-aid-has-the-u-s-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts/>.

¹¹ “US House Approves \$14.3B Military Aid Package for Israel amid Gaza War,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-house-approves-143b-military-aid-package-for-israel-amid-gaza-war/3041878>.

¹² *How Did Germany Fare without Russian Gas?*, accessed June 21, 2024, https://html5-player.libsyn.com/embed/episode/id/28412834/height/360/width/640/theme/standard/autoplay/no/next/no/autoplay/yes/autoplay/no/preload/no/no_addthis/no/direction/backward/no-cache/true/.

¹³ “France Prepares for Total Cutoff of Russian Gas | Reuters,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-gas-cutoff-most-likely-scenario-french-finance-minister-2022-07-10/>.

¹⁴ “Italy’s Dependence on Russian Gas down to 25% from 40%, Draghi Says | Reuters,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italys-dependence-russian-gas-down-25-40-draghi-says-2022-06-24/>.

¹⁵ “Poland Remains EU’s Biggest Importer of Russian LPG, Paying €710 Million to Moscow Last Year | Notes From Poland,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/04/04/poland-remains-eus-biggest-importer-of-russian-lpg-paying-e710-million-to-moscow-last-year/>.

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is dependent upon Russia for 38% of its energy needs.¹⁶ The above energy interdependency shows the perils of the conflictual model of interstate relations.

Prior to the Israeli Genocide in Gaza, the absence of a serious peace process on Palestine in the Middle East was creating fissures and instability. It accentuated the sense of deprivation amongst the oppressed Palestinians. The entire US-Israeli strategy was focused on trade, commerce and economic integration in a “New Middle East,” minus the Palestinians. The idea is now buried under the rubble in Gaza in the wake of the October 7, 2023, “Al Aqsa Storm.” Ideas of connectivity and economic integration like the India-Middle East-Israel-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), connecting Indian ports with the Gulf Ports and from there onwards linking Gulf commercial hubs with the Israeli Port Haifa for ultimately connecting it to Europe, were being mooted in foras like G 20 conferences. China had stepped in for rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the strength of its geo-economic clout. As per a statement of the Saudi prince Faisal Bin Farhan, during 10th Arab-China Business Conference, the trade volume between China and the Arab world had reached \$430 billion.¹⁷ The Gaza War is an anachronism in this age of economic integration and is a result of a Hobbesian mindset that privileges competition over cooperation. Even in the USA, no less than a former President, i.e., Jimmy Carter had said that “the United States and almost all other nations recognise that Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are a violation of international law and the primary incitement to violence among Palestinians.”¹⁸ The world, however, has realised

¹⁶ “Europe’s Dependence on Russian Natural Gas: Perspectives and Recommendations for a Long-Term Strategy | George C. Marshall European Center For Security Studies,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/occasional-papers/europes-dependence-russian-natural-gas-perspectives-and-recommendations-long-term-strategy-0>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Hanif, “KSA-China Growing Relations Will Benefit Pakistan,” *Pakistan Observer*, last modified June 15, 2023, <https://pakobserver.net/ksa-china-growing-relations-will-benefit-pakistan-by-muhammad-hanif/>.

¹⁸ “Palestinian Elections: Trip Report by Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter,” *The Carter Center*, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc2287.html>.

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the untenability of the USA's blind support to Israel as is evidenced by the yawning gap between the street and the elite in the West.

The global community has understood the hollowness of the so-called 'rules-based order' promoted by the West which because of the politics of exclusion has alienated the rest of the world. It is based on double standards. The rules based disorder that perpetuates the hegemony of the West and promotes the "Victors' Justice" in the UN Security Council is no longer the preferred social contract for the international community, therefore, this is unacceptable to the world's majority. The UN Security Council despite several sessions has not been able to enforce a ceasefire in a conflict that has resulted in a humanitarian tragedy of epic proportions. The conditions appear propitious for a new global social contract with the hope rekindled in the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) in San Francisco where Presidents Xi Jinping and Biden met and evinced interest in continuing with trade and economic cooperation, despite different geo-political objectives.¹⁹ Perhaps the following statement of President Xi Jinping sums up the Chinese worldview, which strikes a resonant chord with a large majority of Western as well as non-Western war-weary nations: "I am still of the view that major-country competition is not the prevailing trend of current times and cannot solve the problems facing China and the United States or the world at large. Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed, and one country's success is an opportunity for the other."²⁰

¹⁹ The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China before Bilateral Meeting | Woodside, CA," The White House, November 15, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/11/15/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-before-bilateral-meeting-woodside-ca/>.

²⁰ The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China before Bilateral Meeting | Woodside, CA," The White House, November 15, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/11/15/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-before-bilateral-meeting-woodside-ca/>.

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While the Chinese think that the planet Earth is big enough for all the competitors, paranoia is reaching a feverish pitch in the West. The USA as a dominant global power for long is now confronted with the specter of losing that ascendancy to a rival that is catching up fast. The biggest worry of the USA is the closing of the gap between the Chinese hi-tech sector and that of the USA. The Chip Wars suddenly become a top priority with mini-lateral groupings such as “Chips Four “emerging to challenge the global ascendancy of China in AI, Quantum computing, and electronics.²¹ The alliance proposed by the US includes Asian semiconductor powers such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, intending to thwart chip-making dominance. Ironically, there is a swapping of roles: socialist China is the leader and exponent of free trade and globalisation, while capitalist USA, once the champion of free trade, globalisation and market liberalisation hunkering down in competitive mode, erecting barriers to free trade and promoting protectionism. In the initial flush of competitive paranoia, the US policymakers toyed with the idea of decoupling but then transited to de-risking, a euphemism for ‘Contain China’ measures.

To counter China, a skein of competing alliances is being created by the USA, reinforced by over 400 military bases in Asia. There are indications of extending NATO’s reach into Asia with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines being motivated to join an ‘Asian NATO’ or the ‘New NATO on the Pacific.’²² In 2022, NATO released a new strategic concept citing China as the new strategic ‘threat.’ Though the USA disavows Asian NATO’s concept, the contours of that concept are alive in the shape of alliances like QUAD, AUKUS, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The EU however, despite remaining a traditional part of the Euro-Atlantic alliance, has started making overtures toward China

²¹ Dashveenjit Kaur, “Is There Really a Chip 4 Alliance? Officially, It’s Still a Proposal,” *Tech Wire Asia*, January 10, 2023, <https://techwireasia.com/01/2023/is-there-really-a-chip-4-alliance-officially-its-still-a-proposal/>.

²² “Never Say Never to an Asian NATO,” *Foreign Policy*, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/06/asian-nato-security-alliance-china-us-quad-aucus-japan-australia-taiwan-military-biden/>.

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to retain a measure of strategic autonomy in its politico-economic decision-making. French President Emmanuel Macron's two visits to China are a testament to that desire. President Macron evinced a desire to remain engaged with China in the fields of AI, quantum computing, and digital technology, allaying Chinese concerns about European adherence to the US-influenced decoupling strategy vis a vis China.²³ The Ukraine War has highlighted the vulnerability of the European economies to energy shortages and from that a realisation to exercise 'strategic autonomy' vis-a-vis relations with China and Russia.²⁴ The strategy of decoupling now is giving way to de-risking which essentially means retaining options for the Europeans' own economic, technological, and business interests.

The Middle East has also realised the benefits of multilateral engagement instead of being part of the bloc politics of yesteryears. The independent stance of BRICS countries on Palestine, especially the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman's statement about banning the export of weapons to Israel and the "Two State Solution" being the pre-requisite for sustainable peace in the Middle East, indicates an assertive multilateralism taking concrete shape.²⁵ The recent Saudi decision not to renew their 50-year-old petrodollar deal with the United States is also indicative of a move towards dedollarisation, further undermining American financial hegemony.

Multipolarity, therefore, is emerging as the dominant credo of the twenty-first century with minilateralism and multilateralism co-existing as a process that is ultimately leading towards a strengthened multilateralism

²³ "President Macron Pays State Visit to China," France in the UK, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://uk.ambafrance.org/President-Macron-pays-State-visit-to-China>.

²⁴ Armin Steinbach, "The EU's Turn to 'Strategic Autonomy': Leeway for Policy Action and Points of Conflict," *European Journal of International Law* 34, no. 4 (November 1, 2023): 973–1006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chad048>.

²⁵ Hazar Kilani, "Saudi Crown Prince Calls for Halt to Weapons Exports to Israel during BRICS Meeting," *Doha News* | Qatar, November 22, 2023, <https://dohanews.co/saudi-crown-prince-calls-for-halt-to-weapons-exports-to-israel-during-brics-meeting/>.

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shaping a multipolar world.²⁶ Closer to home, in South Asia, while elections in India have sprung a pleasant surprise, with Modi's *Hindutva* trumped by an effective opposition alliance of secularists, Muslims and Dalits, economic inequality featuring 800 million poor Indians on the state dole and joblessness evidenced by 45% youth unemployment, this region with three nuclear powers is far from stable or peaceful. The popular, spontaneous, indigenous, and widespread uprising of the Kashmiri people continues as they seek self-determination enshrined in the United Nations resolutions. India continues to pursue the 'Israeli Model' of trying to change the demographics in Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK). Its annexation by India in August 2019 has not altered political ground realities. The US Intelligence Community's Annual Threat Assessment 2024, a 42-page public document, and points out two potential flashpoints in South Asia: India-China and India-Pakistan. Focusing on 'Potential Interstate Conflict', the Annual Threat Assessment 2024, warns that massive border deployments on the Indo-China border 'risk miscalculation and escalation into armed conflict.' Referring to the 'fragile calm' in current Pakistan-India ties, the U.S. Intelligence Community still sees 'the potential for an event to trigger a rapid escalation'.²⁷

The consequent transition of the world from bipolarity to multipolarity is full of headwinds. The problems like the lack of appreciation of the tectonic shift in geo-politics, bloc politics' effort for a comeback, and the last-ditch efforts of a global hegemon to perpetuate its hegemony stand in the way of a smooth embrace of multilateralism and geo-economics by the international community. There are signs that middle Powers like Brazil, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Japan are reviewing their options to embrace multilateralism based on mutually beneficial trade and economic partnerships. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815 countries like Britain,

²⁶ Emma Ashford, "Yes the World Is Multipolar," *Foreign Policy*, October 5, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/05/usa-china-multipolar-bipolar-unipolar/>.

²⁷ "ATA-2024-Unclassified-Report.Pdf," accessed June 20, 2024, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2024-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

France, Austria, and Prussia agreed upon the “Concert of Europe” which promoted a balance of power to be maintained, and allowed countries like Austria and Prussia to carve out Poland as per their geopolitical needs.²⁸ The relative peace on the European continent during that period epitomised a legitimate order agreed upon by all members of the Concert of Europe. However, the legitimacy of the order masqueraded basic differences and grievances that resurfaced in 1914, when the member countries opted out of the Concert. The World today needs another such “equilibrium-providing” arrangement, albeit at a global level, that has the consensus of all nations.

Conclusion

The dominant trends of the present age point towards the need for trade, connectivity, and partnerships amongst nations to provide public goods to people while sharing the global commons equitably and responsibly. It is up to global powers and other members of the international community to get on the right side of history by shunning the geopolitics of confrontation. The threats like climate change, food insecurity, water resources depletion, pandemics, and nuclear Armageddon staring humanity in the face, require a collegial international response. The adversarial politics divides instead of uniting. The new global equilibrium requires a more democratic and reformed United Nations Organisation that does not suffer the kind of rigour mortis suffered by the present organisation in the face of crises like Ukraine and Gaza. Despite the obduracy of government establishments, the Cri de Coeur of the agitated humanity offers hope. The governments must listen to the people clamouring for justice in Gaza on the streets as opposed to the duality and morally weak response of the establishments. The hope lies in the force of public opinion that might nudge the governments towards a global order based upon the rules that promote justice, equity, and human security. For Pakistan, the current regional and

²⁸ “Concert of Europe (The) | EHNE,” accessed June 21, 2024, <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/international-relations/organizing-international-system/concert-europe>.

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global scenario provides a great opportunity given the 'Strategic Space' to pursue a regional-based foreign policy with a focus on becoming a hub of regional connectivity. Several factors like the end of the war in Afghanistan after 42 years and the exit of American forces from that country, the revival of CPEC, the Iran-Saudi rapprochement brokered by China, which means no more Iran-Saudi proxy wars, and a weakened and chastened Modi plus US focused on raging conflicts in Europe, and the Middle East plus its own problems, provide 'Strategic Space' to a Muslim Middle Power like Pakistan, which together with other Muslim Middle Powers like Türkiye, Iran and Saudi Arabia can play a major role in the coming decade. Pakistan badly needs a 'Regional Reset' with its neighbours, a 'Healing Touch' at home and scrupulous avoidance of getting embroiled in any new Great Game in the region. ■

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