

# Great Power Competition (GPC) and its Implications on the Global Security Architecture

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## Abstract

This study explores the renewed prominence of Great Power Competition (GPC) and its far-reaching implications for global security, employing a qualitative research design centered on the analysis of secondary sources. Through a comprehensive review of academic literature, official policy documents, and expert analyses, the paper investigates how strategic rivalries particularly those involving the United States, China, and Russia are transforming the contemporary security landscape. Grounded in realist theory, the study also engages with broader conceptual frameworks to capture both the structural and ideational aspects of GPC. The findings identify three interrelated dimensions; military and security, economic and technological, and ideological and normative as critical arenas in which great powers are asserting influence and contesting global norms. Each of these domains underscores the multifaceted nature of current geopolitical rivalries and their impact on global security architecture. By synthesizing insights from diverse disciplines and perspectives, the paper offers a nuanced understanding of GPC as a defining dynamic of today's international order. It concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for adaptable and forward-looking governance mechanisms capable of mitigating this competition and fostering long-term stability in an increasingly competitive world.

**Key words:** Global Power Competition (GPC); Iran-Israeli Escalation; Global Powers; Trilateral Relations; Realism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global security architecture has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, marked by a resurgence of great power competition, particularly among the United States, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Russian Federation. The post-Cold War era, which commenced in the early 1990s, was generally characterized by a notable decline in overt political, ideological, and military rivalry among the world's major powers. This period fostered a sense of relative geopolitical stability, underpinned by a U.S. led international order grounded in liberal democratic values and multilateral institutions (Mearsheimer, 2019; White, 2018). However, signs of erosion in this order began to emerge between 2006 and 2008, culminating in a more evident breakdown by 2014. The annexation of Crimea by Russia and China's assertive actions in the South China Sea were early indicators of a shifting global power dynamic (Mazarr et al., 2022). These actions signaled a move away from a unipolar world toward a multipolar system, in which revisionist states actively contest U.S. primacy and seek to redefine the global order to align with their own strategic interests and authoritarian governance models (Mazarr, 2022).

The resurgence of China and the geopolitical assertiveness of Russia have triggered structural changes in the global security architecture. Both countries are pursuing revisionist goals, seeking not only greater influence but a transformation of the existing liberal

international order. According to Hayat and Khalil (2020), this trend has led to a decline in arms control norms and an intensification of nuclear modernization both symptoms of eroding strategic stability. China and Russia have increasingly found common cause in challenging Western norms and institutions. While the partnership is asymmetrical with China being the senior partner, especially post-Ukraine war, it nonetheless forms a coherent axis of anti-hegemonic resistance. Xi Jinping's 2023 declaration to Putin that they are "pushing changes unseen in a century" captures the transformative ambitions behind their strategic alignment (Ilyinsky & Magamedov, 2023). Another significant developments in this great power competition is the resurgence of geo-economics. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, serves not just as an infrastructure program but as a geopolitical tool to expand Beijing's strategic footprint across Asia, Africa, and Europe (Farhadi, 2021). Critics have labeled this strategy a "debt trap diplomacy," warning that it allows China to acquire political influence through economic dependencies (Miller, 2022). In response, the U.S. has launched competing initiatives such as the India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and implemented protectionist trade measures, including tariffs and export restrictions on advanced technologies. The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 exemplifies this strategy, aiming to restore U.S. technological primacy by incentivizing domestic semiconductor production while restricting China's access to critical technologies like AI and quantum computing (Schroeder, 2023).

The escalation of this competition was further underscored by the deepening strategic partnership between China and Russia, which reached a symbolic milestone with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This invasion did not merely represent a regional conflict; it served as a clear indication of the emergence of a new era of strategic confrontation. This period is increasingly defined by ideological divides, economic decoupling, technological rivalry, and military posturing (Summary, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019). Unlike previous decades, where the central focus of U.S. foreign and security policy was on counterterrorism and managing threats posed by non-state actors, current U.S. strategy reflects a paradigmatic shift. There is now a renewed emphasis on state-centric threats, particularly those posed by near-peer competitors such as China and Russia (White, 2018). This transformation is evident in U.S. defense planning, diplomatic initiatives, and alliance management strategies, all of which are being recalibrated to address the long-term challenges of strategic competition (Mazarr et al., 2022). Furthermore, this renewed geopolitical rivalry could usher in a prolonged period of uncertainty and reduced global security stability. Analysts warn that if left unchecked, this competitive environment could lead to the gradual disintegration of the existing liberal

international order and potentially increase the risk of major power conflict (Mearsheimer, 2019; Mazarr, 2022).

The resurgence of great power competition has also revived global arms races. According to SIPRI (2023), global defense spending surged in 2023 for the first time since the financial crisis, reflecting widespread modernization of conventional and nuclear capabilities. This militarization increases the likelihood of miscalculations, particularly in flashpoints like the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and Eastern Europe (Gallagher, 2019; Wu, 2020). Increased investment in dual-use technologies, those applicable to both civilian and military domains has blurred the lines between economic competition and strategic confrontation. China's integration of engineering, diplomatic, and military tools starting with infrastructure projects and culminating in strategic footholds illustrates the comprehensive nature of this rivalry (Farhadi & Bekdash, 2021). The new architecture of global power is characterized by fluidity, competition, and recalibration. The United States, China, and Russia are not only reshaping global alliances but also challenging foundational norms governing security, trade, and diplomacy. Whether this results in a stable multipolar order or a more dangerous bipolar standoff remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the world is entering a new phase of strategic rivalry with profound implications for global peace, cooperation, and governance.

The intensifying great power competition is increasingly reflected in the ongoing global trade war mainly between the United States and China. Spearheaded by the U.S., the global trade war, most visibly manifest in its economic standoff with China has not only altered the landscape of international trade but also significantly impacted the broader architecture of global security. What initially appeared to be a series of economic disputes has evolved into a strategic confrontation with wide-reaching implications. The pivot by the United States toward a more protectionist economic agenda, especially under the Trump administration, disrupted decades of established trade relationships. Central to this shift were the imposition of tariffs on key imports such as steel and aluminum, along with a broader range of Chinese products. These measures marked the start of a high-stakes trade conflict that has sent shockwaves through global markets and strained diplomatic ties (Baig et al., 2023). The consequences of the trade war extend well beyond economics. They have disrupted global alliance structures, undermined confidence in multilateral institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), and fueled strategic competition between global powers. The U.S. justified its actions by citing a range of motivations, including efforts to reduce the national trade deficit, address concerns about intellectual property theft, and challenge the dominance of China's state-directed economic policies. Operating

under the “America First” policy framework, the Trump administration employed legislative tools such as Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act citing national security threats and Section 301 of the Trade Act to combat what it deemed unfair trade practices. These aggressive trade measures prompted swift retaliatory responses from China and other affected nations, escalating what began as targeted tariffs into a broad and sustained global trade conflict (Breuss & Christen, 2019). In summary, the world is transitioning into an era where strategic competition among great powers dominates the global security agenda, overshadowing previous concerns like international terrorism. The assertive actions of China and Russia, their challenge to the prevailing international norms, and the corresponding strategic recalibration by the United States reflect a broader, structural change in global politics, one that demands sustained academic, policy, and diplomatic attention. Consequently, this research aims to explore the dynamics of great power competition and its implications on global security architecture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: DYNAMICS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

In recent years, Great Power Competition (GPC) has regained prominence as a guiding concept in international relations, especially within the strategic narratives of U.S. foreign policy. It encapsulates the enduring rivalry among leading global actors seeking to shape the rules, norms, and institutions of the international order to serve their interests. The U.S. 2017 National Security Strategy marked a pivotal shift by formally recognizing this framework, redirecting strategic focus away from counterterrorism toward a more sustained contest with near-peer competitors chiefly China and Russia (Mankoff, 2020). The notion of GPC is deeply rooted in classical and neorealist international theory. Foundational thinkers like Waltz (1979) and Zakaria (2008) emphasize that power competition is a natural outcome of an anarchic global system where major states strive to maintain or expand influence. Mearsheimer (2001) further elaborates that states pursue maximum power to secure their survival, making strategic rivalry an unavoidable condition. This thinking is echoed in the “Thucydides Trap” hypothesis, which posits that shifts in the balance of power particularly when rising states threaten established powers are likely to provoke systemic instability and conflict (Allison, 2017).

America’s strategic recalibration toward GPC has been shaped by the erosion of its unipolar status and the ascent of states intent on revising the liberal order. The Trump-era policy documents particularly the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy redefined the global arena as one of persistent strategic competition.

These documents identified authoritarian regimes like China and Russia as primary challenges to U.S. interests and global stability (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). As Mankoff (2020) notes, this repositioning reflects growing anxiety about China’s technological advances and Russia’s aggressive maneuvers in regions such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East. China’s approach to GPC has drawn considerable scholarly attention. Fravel (2019) outlines a multi-dimensional strategy combining economic leverage, military modernization, and ideological projection. Through mechanisms like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Beijing seeks to create alternative global structures that mirror its political and developmental ethos. Doshi (2021) argues that these efforts are part of a broader plan to displace the U.S.-led liberal international order with a more China-centric system. From a technological standpoint, China’s pursuit of cutting-edge industries ranging from AI and quantum computing to high-tech manufacturing is integral to its quest for strategic leadership. Rahman (2025) observes that these investments reflect not just economic ambition but a deliberate strategy to challenge American dominance across global supply chains and digital infrastructures.

Russia’s engagement in GPC is shaped by its geopolitical aspirations and structural limitations. Despite having a less diverse economy, Russia employs asymmetric tactics such as cyber interference, disinformation campaigns, and strategic energy diplomacy to exert influence on the global stage (Zendelovski, 2024). Scholars like Galeotti (2016) and Charap & Colton (2017) describe Moscow’s actions in Ukraine, Syria, and cyberspace as manifestations of a hybrid warfare doctrine designed to circumvent conventional power limitations. Bremmer (2019) adds that these aggressive behaviors are underpinned by a broader narrative of national revival, where reclaiming great power status justifies assertive military posture and nuclear brinkmanship. This worldview positions Western alliances like NATO as existential threats to Russian sovereignty and regional dominance. Beyond tangible assets like military and technology, GPC also plays out on an ideological battlefield. Analysts such as Deibler (2020) and Müller (2024) highlight the clash between liberal democratic ideals championed by the U.S. and the authoritarian governance models promoted by China and Russia. This contest extends into multilateral institutions where each side seeks to assert its vision of digital sovereignty, human rights, and international law (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Kaczmarek (2020) notes that Beijing and Moscow have found sympathetic audiences in parts of the Global South, where skepticism of Western interventions and conditional aid fuels support for state-centric development models.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE REALIST CONSTRUCT OF GPC

Realism remains one of the most enduring and influential theories in the study of international relations. Rooted in the notion that the international system is fundamentally anarchic, realism holds that sovereign states acting in a self-help environment are primarily driven by the pursuit of power and the imperative of survival. These assumptions position realism as a particularly compelling lens through which to interpret the current state of great power competition, especially between the United States, China, and Russia. By focusing on concepts such as the balance of power, security dilemma, and the logic of alliances, realism provides critical insights into the trilateral geopolitical tensions shaping 21st-century international politics. The realist tradition encompasses a broad spectrum of thought. Classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau viewed the pursuit of power as rooted in human nature, arguing that national interest defined in terms of power is the primary driver of state behavior. In contrast, structural or neorealist theorists like Kenneth Waltz shifted the focus to the international system itself, suggesting that the absence of a central authority compels states to compete for power and security. This anarchic structure explains why conflict and competition are enduring features of global politics. Within structural realism, two main strands emerge: defensive realism and offensive realism. Defensive realists, such as Waltz, argue that states seek enough power to ensure their survival, favoring balance over dominance. Offensive realists like John Mearsheimer contend that in order to guarantee security, states must strive for regional or even global hegemony, as maximizing power is the surest path to survival (Mearsheimer, 2006). This theoretical divide underpins many contemporary debates on international strategy and foreign policy.

The meteoric rise of China over the past two decades economically, militarily, and technologically has prompted significant anxiety in Washington and among its allies. Realist scholars interpret China's ascent through the framework of power transition theory, which suggests that periods of hegemonic transition are especially prone to conflict. According to Carla Norrlöf, China's challenge to U.S. dominance is multidimensional, encompassing trade, technology, military capabilities, and geopolitical influence. This situation evokes the historical analogy of the "Thucydides Trap," where fear of a rising power (Athens) by a ruling power (Sparta) led to inevitable war (Norrlöf, 2021). Within this view, U.S. China relations are structurally predisposed toward confrontation. In addition, from a realist standpoint, the growing strategic convergence between China and Russia is a predictable response to the global distribution of power. Structural realism posits that states will form alignments not out of ideological affinity, but to counterbalance dominant

actors. Scholars such as James MacHaffie argue that the evolving Sino-Russian partnership evident in military exercises, diplomatic coordination, and energy deals reflects a rational alignment aimed at balancing against U.S. global primacy (MacHaffie, 2011). Similarly, Jingjiao Hu emphasizes that their strategic cooperation, particularly following the Ukraine crisis, is grounded in shared concerns about the U.S.-led liberal order and NATO's expansion (Hu, 2024).

Central Asia serves as a case study in realist geopolitics, with both China and Russia seeking to exert influence in the region as part of broader efforts to secure strategic depth and counter Western encroachment. Russia has historically treated the region as its sphere of influence, leveraging economic and military ties to maintain dominance. Meanwhile, China has expanded its footprint through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), initiatives that project Chinese influence while subtly undermining Russia's primacy. Nasuh Uslu notes that these maneuvers reflect a realist strategy of power accumulation in a contested, multipolar environment (Uslu, 2024). In response to rising challenges from both China and Russia, the United States has recalibrated its strategic priorities. The adoption of the 2017 National Security Strategy marked a clear return to great power competition as the guiding principle of U.S. foreign and defense policy. Realists see this as a natural adaptation to changing power dynamics, consistent with the logic that unipolarity is unsustainable over the long term. Wayne Schroeder argues that the United States must sustain real growth in defense investment and adapt its force posture to confront this multipolar threat environment (Schroeder, 2023).

Another key concept in realist theory is the security dilemma; the notion that measures taken by one state to increase its security such as military buildup can provoke insecurity in others, thereby escalating tensions. This is evident in how each of the three powers interprets the actions of the others. For instance, while the U.S. views China's South China Sea activities as aggressive, China perceives American freedom-of-navigation operations as containment. Likewise, Russia's moves in Ukraine are framed by the Kremlin as defensive reactions to NATO expansion, while the West views them as acts of aggression (Mankoff, 2021). Conclusively, realist theory continues to offer a powerful framework for understanding the competitive dynamics among the United States, China, and Russia. By focusing on the anarchic nature of the international system, the relentless pursuit of power, and the logic of balancing, realism reveals why these three powers frequently find themselves at odds. Whether through alliance formation, regional influence campaigns, or strategic recalibrations, each state's behavior largely conforms to realist predictions. In an era marked by declining unipolarity and resurging multipolar rivalry,



realism not only explains the present but also warns of the structural pressures that could lead to future conflict.

#### 4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF GPC AND ITS DOMAINS

Strategic competition among dominant great powers is a deeply rooted phenomenon in world history. From ancient times, states have engaged in competitive dynamics to assert political influence and military dominance. The classical contest between Athens and Sparta for supremacy over ancient Greece exemplifies early manifestations of power struggles. Although the nature of these rivalries has evolved, the fundamental logic of competition remains persistent even if historical analogies are increasingly complex to draw in the modern era (Evans, 2023). The 20th century bore witness to a particularly intense phase of great power competition during the Cold War, characterized by ideological, military, and geopolitical confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The U.S. aimed to prevent Soviet expansion, while the USSR sought strategic parity, primarily by shifting the global balance of military power in its favor (Raska, 2019). A resurgence of this dynamic became evident in 2014, marked by Russia's annexation of Crimea and its broader confrontation with Ukraine. This act of aggression signaled a clear return to strategic competition in international relations. By 2017, the landscape had solidified into a trilateral contest for global influence among the United States, China, and Russia, each with distinct ambitions and approaches to reshaping the world order (Lynch III, 2020); (Ali & Ali, 2021).

Russia, in particular, has reasserted itself through traditional military power, nuclear capabilities, and disinformation strategies reminiscent of Soviet-era tactics. Its aim is to destabilize the existing security structure and assert dominance within regions of strategic importance (Banasik, 2022); (Larsen, 2022). China, by contrast, is leveraging rapid economic development and technological advancement to expand its global influence. It seeks not only regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific but also a redefined international order that aligns with its authoritarian governance model (Lynch III, 2021); (Grosse et al., 2021). Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) illustrate China's global strategic ambitions (Ali & Ali, 2021). The recognition of these shifts is embedded in key strategic documents such as NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, which frames both Russia and China as systemic challenges to the alliance's security, values, and interests (Lee & Schreer, 2022). Increasingly, major European powers are acknowledging the resurgence of geopolitical rivalry as a central issue in their defense and foreign policies. NATO has thus begun adapting to the realities of a multipolar security environment, with simultaneous challenges emanating

from Moscow and Beijing (Larsen, 2022); (Mankoff, 2020).

In academic discourse and policy circles, the term "strategic competition" has become more preferable than traditional "great power competition." This semantic shift reflects a broader understanding of rivalry that encompasses not only military and ideological contests but also economic, technological, and institutional domains. The Biden administration, for example, emphasized strategic competition with China as uniquely consequential, distinguished it from other global challenges due to China's potential to reshape international norms and power structures (Mazarr, 2022); (Renewed, 2022). This framing implies that the United States regards China not just as a peer competitor but as the foremost strategic threat to its long-standing global leadership, raising comparisons to the Cold War era rivalry with the Soviet Union (Mahbubani, 2022); (Nye, 2021). Today's strategic competition is defined by its complexity, with overlapping economic, military, and ideological dimensions. While reminiscent of the Cold War, the current multipolar and interconnected environment demands more nuanced strategies. As the U.S., Russia, and China pursue competing visions of global order, the stakes are high, not only for the balance of power but for the norms and institutions that govern international relations. The three identified domains of great power competition can be explained as follow:

##### 4.1 Military and Security Domain of GPC

In the contemporary international system, military power remains a central pillar of statecraft and a critical instrument through which great powers assert influence, protect strategic interests, and shape the global order. Despite the increasing relevance of economic, technological, and ideological dimensions of power, the capacity for military projection continues to differentiate major powers from peripheral actors. The ongoing rivalry among the United States, China, and Russia exemplifies the persistence of military dominance as a tool of geopolitical leverage and deterrence. The United States, with its expansive global military footprint, remains the most militarily capable nation in the world. It maintains over 750 military bases across more than 80 countries and commands unmatched capabilities in conventional, nuclear, cyber, and space domains (Vuving, 2020). U.S. defense policy has progressively emphasized a multi-domain warfare approach, integrating traditional armed forces with cyber operations, satellite-based systems, and artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced battlefield capabilities. Strategic alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the AUKUS security pact, and bilateral security treaties in the Indo-Pacific serve to amplify U.S. global reach and facilitate power projection in key geopolitical theaters (Domingo, 2016). In particular, the U.S. Department of Defense has focused on deterrence

in the Indo-Pacific, signaling a pivot toward countering China's regional assertiveness and safeguarding sea lanes, cyberspace integrity, and space-based communications infrastructure (Stokes & Hsiao, 2020).

China, in contrast, is rapidly transforming its military doctrine and force structure in pursuit of regional preeminence and eventual global parity with the United States. Since the early 2000s, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has undergone a sweeping modernization campaign aimed at achieving "informatized" and "intelligentized" warfare terms that denote the integration of advanced technologies into command systems, weapons platforms, and decision-making processes. China's military strategy places particular emphasis on cyber capabilities, hypersonic glide vehicles, anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems, and the development of a true blue-water navy capable of operating beyond its immediate region (Vuving, 2020; Fravel, 2019). The modernization of its naval forces, including aircraft carriers and submarines, is designed to secure maritime claims in the South and East China Seas and deter U.S. intervention in a potential Taiwan contingency (Domingo, 2016). Moreover, China has significantly expanded its space-based infrastructure and satellite surveillance, essential for precision targeting and secure communications. The PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF), established in 2015, reflects Beijing's commitment to building a joint operations force capable of dominating emerging domains such as cyberspace and outer space (Cheng, 2021). These advancements aim to erode U.S. technological superiority while signaling China's growing willingness to defend its national interests assertively.

Russia, while economically constrained and burdened by Western sanctions, continues to maintain formidable military capabilities with a particular focus on asymmetric strategies. Moscow's military doctrine underscores nuclear deterrence as the ultimate guarantor of its sovereignty and influence. Russia possesses the world's largest stockpile of nuclear warheads and frequently incorporates nuclear signaling in its strategic communications, particularly in conflicts involving NATO's eastern flank (Zendelovski, 2024). Beyond nuclear capabilities, Russia excels in hybrid warfare blending conventional military force with cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and the use of proxy actors to destabilize adversaries without provoking direct military retaliation (Galeotti, 2016). The 2022 invasion of Ukraine marked a pivotal moment in demonstrating both Russia's military ambitions and the limitations of its conventional power. While the war exposed weaknesses in logistical coordination and morale, it also revealed Russia's capacity to sustain high-intensity conflict and use energy security as a strategic lever against Europe. The integration of disinformation, cyber operations, and covert paramilitary units such as the Wagner Group reflects a highly adaptive form of

warfare that leverages non-linear tactics for political gain (Zendelovski, 2024; Bukkvoll, 2015). This tripolar military competition is not confined to the terrestrial domain. The militarization of cyberspace and outer space has become a defining feature of modern strategic rivalry. The U.S. Space Force, China's rapid satellite proliferation, and Russia's anti-satellite weapons tests all signify the recognition of space as a critical frontier in ensuring national security and operational superiority (Stokes & Hsiao, 2020). Simultaneously, cyber espionage campaigns such as SolarWinds (linked to Russian actors) and attacks on Western tech infrastructure (attributed to Chinese groups) underscore how the lines between peacetime and wartime behavior are increasingly blurred in this new security environment. In summary, military and security dynamics remain fundamental to great power competition. The United States continues to leverage its global alliances and technological edge to maintain dominance, while China pursues military modernization to challenge the U.S.-led security architecture, particularly in Asia. Meanwhile, Russia, through a combination of nuclear deterrence and hybrid tactics, remains a destabilizing force intent on preserving regional hegemony and undermining Western cohesion. As emerging domains of warfare grow in strategic importance, the military dimensions of great power rivalry are poised to become even more complex, technologically driven, and globally consequential.

#### **4.2 Economic and Technological Domain of GPC**

In the 21st century, the axis of great power competition has decisively shifted toward domains of economic and technological supremacy, with the United States and China at the center of this rivalry. Unlike the industrial-based rivalries of the 20th century, the current struggle for global influence increasingly revolves around control over critical and emerging technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and 5G telecommunications infrastructure. These technologies are not only the foundation of the modern digital economy but also integral to national security, societal resilience, and geopolitical dominance. As Rahman (2025) argues, technological superiority now constitutes the linchpin of strategic leverage in a digitally interconnected world, where economic policy is inseparable from broader geopolitical aims. The United States has sought to preserve its technological leadership by reinforcing its innovation ecosystem, which is characterized by a strong private sector, research universities, venture capital, and regulatory transparency. Washington has also increasingly turned to strategic alliances such as the Quad, G7, and NATO to build coalitions capable of defending what it frames as a "free and open digital order" (Solsona, 2024). This includes joint efforts to counter authoritarian technological models and to safeguard critical supply chains. By contrast, China has adopted a more centralized, state-driven approach,

guided by policies like “Made in China 2025” and the “Dual Circulation” strategy. These policies emphasize technological self-sufficiency, innovation leadership, and the setting of international norms through state-led investment, state-owned enterprises, and aggressive global outreach (Dollar, 2022; Janjua, 2024).

This clash of systems has increasingly been framed as a “technology war,” reflecting how deeply economic strategy is now intertwined with national security and geopolitical rivalry. The competition is most intense in sectors that underpin both commercial innovation and military power. Chief among these is the semiconductor industry, a foundational technology for nearly all advanced systems, from AI algorithms to defense platforms. The United States has responded to China’s technological advances by imposing sweeping export controls on the transfer of advanced chips and lithography equipment, particularly those related to cutting-edge fabrication processes below 10 nanometers (Janjua, 2024). The U.S. has also passed landmark legislation such as the CHIPS and Science Act to incentivize domestic semiconductor production, mitigate supply chain risks, and preserve its lead in chip design and manufacturing. The strategic importance of semiconductors is underscored by the pivotal role of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which produces over 90% of the world’s most advanced chips. Taiwan’s technological monopoly has become both a strength and vulnerability in global geopolitics, as it positions the island at the intersection of U.S.-China tensions. A potential disruption in Taiwan’s semiconductor supply would have catastrophic consequences for the global economy, reinforcing the strategic urgency of diversifying chip production hubs (Rahman, 2025; Solsona, 2024).

Beyond semiconductors, the broader economic confrontation between the U.S. and China has evolved into a multifaceted trade conflict. Initially triggered during the Trump administration through tariffs on Chinese goods, the trade war has persisted and intensified under subsequent administrations, now centered primarily on advanced technologies rather than conventional manufacturing sectors (Stango, 2024). Strategic tools such as tariffs, investment restrictions, sanctions, and export controls have become routine instruments of statecraft, illustrating how economic statecraft is wielded in service of geopolitical goals. In contrast to China and the U.S., Russia participates in great power competition through its dominance in energy resources rather than cutting-edge technologies. Despite lacking a comparable innovation ecosystem, Russia exercises significant influence by controlling vital natural gas and oil supplies, particularly to Europe. By manipulating energy flows, imposing export restrictions, or offering favorable contracts selectively, Russia exerts pressure on energy-dependent states and influences their foreign policy alignment (Peters,

2024). This weaponization of economic interdependence exemplifies the realist notion that states exploit their comparative advantages be they technological or resource-based, as tools of coercion and influence.

Moreover, all three powers are increasingly contesting global governance norms related to trade, intellectual property, digital standards, and technology transfers. Multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) have struggled to mediate disputes, leading to a gradual erosion of the post-Cold War liberal economic order. As trust among major powers diminishes, especially in sensitive technological domains, there is growing fragmentation of global supply chains and the rise of techno-blocs, regionalized ecosystems built on aligned security and economic interests (Dollar, 2022; Stango, 2024). In summary, economic and technological supremacy has emerged as the primary frontier in great power rivalry, particularly between the United States and China. The contest for control over semiconductors, AI, and other strategic sectors illustrates the inseparability of innovation policy and national security. While the U.S. leverages its alliances and innovation ecosystems, China pursues a model of techno-nationalism and global standard-setting. Meanwhile, Russia, though technologically behind, employs energy dominance as a geopolitical tool. These dynamics underscore how economic tools are increasingly central to international competition, with profound implications for global stability and the future of the rules-based order.

The intensification of great power rivalry in the 21st century has become increasingly evident in the realm of international trade, with the most prominent manifestation being the global trade war between the United States and China. Far from being a mere exchange of tariff measures, this confrontation represents a strategic inflection point in global political economy. It reflects a broader shift in the international order, where economic tools are now deployed not solely for market advantage but also for strategic leverage and geopolitical signaling (Solsona, 2024; Stango, 2024). The United States, particularly during the administration of President Donald Trump, initiated a series of protectionist measures that disrupted long-standing liberal trade norms. This shift marked a departure from the free-trade consensus that had largely guided U.S. economic policy since the post-World War II era. Trump’s administration embraced a unilateralist and nationalist trade strategy, arguing that existing trade agreements disproportionately benefited competitors especially China at the expense of American workers and industries (Dollar, 2022). Central to this policy realignment was the implementation of wide-ranging tariffs, notably on steel and aluminum, under the justification of protecting national security via Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act. These tariffs were quickly expanded to cover hundreds of billions of dollars’



worth of Chinese goods, from consumer electronics to machinery and textiles. The rationale was not merely economic but strategic: to counteract what the U.S. identified as unfair trade practices, including intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers, and heavy state subsidies in sectors such as telecommunications and high-tech manufacturing (Rahman, 2025; Janjua, 2024).

What began as a tactical trade war soon evolved into a more systemic contest over economic governance and global influence. The Chinese government responded with its own tariffs and non-tariff barriers, but also doubled down on its ambitions for technological self-reliance through programs like “Made in China 2025” and the Digital Silk Road initiative. These moves were interpreted by U.S. strategists not only as economic challenges but also as direct threats to the liberal international order and U.S. technological supremacy (Solsona, 2024). The consequences of this escalating economic confrontation have reverberated far beyond bilateral trade flows. Supply chains have been reconfigured, with firms seeking to “de-risk” or diversify away from China to other parts of Asia and Latin America. Simultaneously, global institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) have found themselves increasingly sidelined, as both Washington and Beijing pursue bilateral or plurilateral arrangements that reflect shifting geopolitical alliances (Stango, 2024). Moreover, the securitization of trade has linked economic policy with broader strategic concerns. Technologies critical to national defense and digital infrastructure such as semiconductors, 5G networks, and AI have become focal points of both industrial policy and export restrictions. These developments signify the erosion of the traditional boundary between economic competition and national security, creating what many scholars now term “geo-economic warfare” (Rahman, 2025; Janjua, 2024). In essence, the U.S. China trade war symbolizes a deeper structural transformation in the international system. It is no longer merely about trade imbalances or market access, but about who sets the rules for global commerce, technology standards, and strategic influence in the decades to come. As the economic standoff continues, it is contributing to a fragmented global order marked by competing blocs, rival regulatory regimes, and diminished institutional trust, a shift with serious implications for both global governance and security.

### 4.3 Ideological and Normative Domain of GPC

Beyond material and military dimensions, the great power rivalry of the 21st century is increasingly defined by ideological and normative contestation. This clash revolves around competing visions for international order, legitimacy, and the role of values in global governance. At the heart of this confrontation lies a fundamental divergence in worldviews: the United States continues to advocate for a liberal international order grounded in democratic governance, human rights, transparency, and

rule-based multilateralism. In contrast, both China and Russia advance alternative models of governance that emphasize state sovereignty, political stability, and the primacy of non-interference values that resonate strongly with many non-Western and Global South states (Deibler, 2020; Barnett & Duvall, 2005). The United States presents itself as the guardian of liberal democracy, promoting values such as individual freedoms, open markets, judicial independence, and inclusive political institutions. These principles are not only embedded in American foreign policy rhetoric but also operationalized through initiatives like democracy promotion programs, civil society partnerships, and conditional foreign aid (Müller, 2024). Washington frequently uses platforms such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, the G7, and regional organizations to reinforce its normative agenda and to censure violations of democratic standards or human rights abuses. Conversely, China and Russia advocate a more relativistic view of governance norms, rejecting what they perceive as Western ideological imperialism. Beijing promotes its model of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which merges authoritarian governance with market-oriented economics. Moscow emphasizes a sovereign democracy model that privileges centralized control, national culture, and the defense of traditional values (Allison, 2013; Lukin, 2019). Both states argue that global governance should accommodate diverse political systems and cultural traditions, challenging the universalist aspirations of the liberal order. This normative contestation is especially visible in multilateral institutions, where diplomatic efforts increasingly reflect ideological divides. For instance, debates in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council often feature competing resolutions on issues such as internet governance, human rights investigations, or humanitarian interventions. China and Russia frequently align to block Western-sponsored resolutions that are framed as intrusive or biased, instead advocating principles of non-interference and state-centric sovereignty (Barnett & Duvall, 2005; Müller, 2024).

Moreover, China and Russia are actively investing in what scholars term “norm entrepreneurship” strategic efforts to shape global narratives and institutional norms. This is accomplished through a combination of foreign aid, media diplomacy, infrastructure investment (e.g., the Belt and Road Initiative), and the expansion of alternative international institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS bloc. These platforms are designed not only to expand their geopolitical influence but also to promote a multipolar world order that legitimizes authoritarian governance and resists Western normative dominance (Müller, 2024; Kaczmarek, 2020). China, for example, uses state-backed media outlets such as CGTN and Xinhua to export narratives that frame its development model as more stable and efficient than



liberal democracies, especially in the wake of Western political polarization and crisis mismanagement. Russia, through networks like RT and Sputnik, engages in narrative warfare to undermine confidence in democratic institutions and to promote the idea of Western hypocrisy on issues like intervention and rights (Gunitsky, 2017; Deibler, 2020). Both powers seek to position themselves as defenders of a new international moral order based on “civilizational pluralism” the idea that no single political system should dominate global standards. These ideological dimensions are not abstract debates but have real consequences for alliance structures, aid conditionality, and public perceptions of legitimacy. States in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East often find the Chinese and Russian approaches more accommodating to their domestic political realities, particularly when compared to Western demands for governance reforms or democratic accountability. This makes the normative struggle a critical and enduring feature of global politics, as it shapes not only institutional behavior but also the identity and orientation of emerging powers.

## 5. TRILATERAL RELATIONS: STRATEGIC COMPETITION AMONG THE GREAT POWERS

The strategic competition among the United States, China, and Russia constitutes the central axis of contemporary international relations, profoundly influencing global politics, economic systems, and security architectures. This trilateral relation is not merely a contest of power capabilities but a clash of ideologies, strategic visions, and institutional preferences that are reshaping the foundations of the international order established after World War II. Each of these powers projects a distinct worldview and normative orientation. The United States, as the principal architect of the liberal international order (LIO), continues to champion norms such as democratic governance, rule of law, open markets, and multilateral cooperation. Its strategic objective is to preserve and adapt this rules-based order, ensuring its continued centrality in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape (Ikenberry, 2011; Nye, 2023). In contrast, China’s ascent over the past four decades has catalyzed a competing vision of global order. Under President Xi Jinping, China advocates for a multipolar system where state sovereignty and non-interference are prioritized over liberal international norms. Beijing’s strategy manifested through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its increasing presence in global institutions seeks to redefine global governance by promoting state-led development models and regional integration under Chinese leadership (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2015; Qadri, 2024). Technologically and economically, China aims to establish autonomy and

global leadership in critical sectors, including artificial intelligence, green energy, and telecommunications. Meanwhile, Russia’s approach is characterized by a revisionist and disruptive posture. Economically less potent, Russia leverages its military capabilities, nuclear arsenal, and geostrategic positioning to challenge Western cohesion and destabilize established norms. Moscow’s strategy is marked by the use of hybrid warfare including cyber-attacks, disinformation, and political subversion—as well as direct military intervention, as evidenced in Ukraine, Syria, and Georgia (Mankoff, 2021; Hall, 2013). Russia seeks to restore influence in the post-Soviet space and portray itself as a counterweight to U.S. and NATO expansion. This trilateral relations can be expanded as follow:

### 5.1 Foundations of U.S. Global Leadership

Following the devastation of World War II, the United States assumed a transformative role in shaping a new global architecture aimed at forestalling the conditions that had led to global conflict and economic depression in the interwar period. This vision coalesced into what became known as the liberal international order (LIO), a framework predicated on shared principles including open markets, democratic governance, multilateral cooperation, the rule of law, and collective security (Ikenberry, 2011). The U.S. did not merely participate in this new order, it led its creation, embedding its influence through pivotal institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which evolved into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and NATO. Each of these institutions became instrumental in institutionalizing U.S. strategic and normative interests across regions. While these efforts were often cast in the language of liberal idealism, they were also deeply pragmatic. The U.S. sought to prevent another descent into great power conflict by fostering economic interdependence and political integration. At the same time, this architecture secured American hegemony, allowing the U.S. to project soft power through cultural diplomacy, economic assistance, and ideological appeal (Ikenberry, 2011; Nye, 2023). Through its global military presence and strategic alliances, Washington also ensured a hard power dominance that dissuaded potential challengers and provided security guarantees to allies. The “indispensable nation” narrative that emerged in the postwar era reflected this unique positioning whereby no major global issue could be resolved without U.S. involvement.

However, the stability of this liberal hegemonic system began to unravel in the early 21st century due to a confluence of systemic and domestic factors. The post-Cold War period, often described as the “unipolar moment”, saw the U.S. exercise unmatched global influence. Yet, this period proved transitory. Emerging

powers like China and Russia began to assert themselves in ways that questioned the norms and institutions of the U.S.-led order. China, leveraging its economic ascendancy, began to offer an alternative model of governance and development, while Russia, emboldened by strategic opportunism and energy wealth, acted to destabilize the status quo in regions like Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Mearsheimer, 2021; Mankoff, 2020). Simultaneously, within the United States, a growing disenchantment with globalization and disillusionment with the costs of global leadership amplified by the failures of interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan fueled populist and nationalist currents. This domestic shift culminated in the “America First” doctrine of the Trump administration, which marked a significant retreat from multilateralism. The U.S. withdrew from agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear deal, questioned NATO obligations, and imposed tariffs on allies, signaling a profound ideological departure from the principles underpinning the LIO. This shift in worldview was formally codified in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, which represented a watershed in American strategic thinking. For the first time since the Cold War, great power competition rather than non-state actors or transnational threats was identified as the primary threat to U.S. national security. The document named China and Russia as revisionist powers intent on undermining American power, influence, and prosperity, a stark departure from the post-Cold War optimism about global liberal convergence (Mankoff, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2021). This strategic pivot reaffirmed the importance of state-centric geopolitics, signaling a return to realist imperatives in U.S. foreign policy. The recognition that the liberal order could no longer be passively preserved and would instead need to be actively defended, has since shaped successive U.S. defense postures, alliance management, and technological strategies.

## 5.2 China: The Rising Challenger and Systemic Rival

China’s transformation from a peripheral actor in the global system to a core contender for international leadership marks one of the most profound shifts in post-Cold War geopolitics. Over the past four decades, China has experienced sustained economic growth, significant military modernization, and a recalibration of its foreign policy from strategic restraint to global assertiveness. This ascent is encapsulated in President Xi Jinping’s vision of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, which aims to restore China’s historical status as a central power in world affairs (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2015; Qadri, 2024). Far from being satisfied with integration into the liberal international order, China now seeks to shape the rules and institutions of that order in line with its strategic and ideological preferences. At the heart of China’s grand strategy are several transformative

initiatives. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, is not merely an infrastructure development project but a deliberate attempt to establish Beijing as the hub of a vast Eurasian economic and logistical network. It aims to build dependency and political leverage across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe through debt-financed construction and investment in ports, railways, and telecommunications infrastructure (Bekkevold, 2019). Complementing the BRI is Made in China 2025, a policy blueprint that targets global leadership in high-tech sectors such as artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace, and green energy. By seeking technological self-sufficiency and dominance in these strategic sectors, China intends to escape dependency on Western innovation while setting global industrial standards.

China’s military modernization has progressed at an accelerated pace, underpinned by substantial increases in defense spending and doctrinal shifts within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Key priorities include the development of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems to challenge U.S. military access to East Asian theaters, as well as the expansion of a blue-water navy capable of projecting power well beyond its near seas (Mearsheimer, 2021). Beijing’s construction and militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea exemplify its ambitions to assert sovereignty over contested waters and reshape maritime norms. These actions, coupled with aggressive patrols and gray-zone tactics, have heightened tensions with regional neighbors and triggered increased U.S. naval presence under the doctrine of freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs). Moreover, China’s strategic alignment with Russia demonstrated through joint military exercises, energy deals, and diplomatic coordination suggests a shared interest in revising the U.S.-dominated order. Concurrently, Beijing is deepening its engagement with resource-rich regions such as Africa and Latin America through trade, investment, and elite co-optation, further diversifying its geopolitical influence and supply chains (Bekkevold, 2019). Beyond material power, China is actively contesting global governance norms. It seeks greater influence within institutions such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and World Health Organization, where it promotes principles of non-interference and state sovereignty over liberal democratic values. The BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) also represent parallel institutional frameworks that challenge Western-led multilateralism. In recognition of these trends, the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept formally identified China as a “systemic challenge,” indicating a strategic consensus within the transatlantic alliance about the threat posed by China’s growing global ambitions and its illiberal model of governance (Mearsheimer, 2021).

### 5.2.1 Key Areas of Strategic Tension

**Military Modernization:** China’s defense buildup,

particularly in A2/AD capabilities and naval assets, is recalibrating regional power balances. The militarization of disputed maritime zones directly threatens U.S. security assurances in the Indo-Pacific.

**Technological Competition:** The race for supremacy in emerging technologies including AI, quantum computing, 5G networks, and semiconductor manufacturing has become central to the U.S.-China rivalry. The U.S. has responded by restricting Chinese access to advanced technologies through export controls, blacklists, and industrial policy aimed at reshoring critical supply chains (Qadri, 2024).

**Global Governance:** China's increased leverage within and outside traditional institutions is enabling it to redefine norms of international behavior, especially regarding digital sovereignty, development finance, and cybersecurity. Beijing's efforts to promote "internet sovereignty" stand in contrast to the U.S.-backed vision of an open, interoperable internet.

The United States has adopted a dual-track strategy of containment and calibrated engagement. On one hand, it has reinforced military alliances and strategic partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) involving the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia and AUKUS, a trilateral defense pact with the UK and Australia aim to deter Chinese expansionism and preserve a rules-based order in Asia (Nye, 2023). On the other hand, Washington continues to manage economic interdependence with China, recognizing the risks of decoupling in a globalized economy while seeking to diversify trade and technology dependencies.

### 5.3 Russia: A Resurgent and Disruptive Power

Despite its economic limitations relative to the United States and China, Russia continues to exert outsized influence in global affairs, driven by its military capabilities, resource endowments, and assertive geopolitical behavior. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has consistently pursued a revisionist foreign policy agenda, rooted in a desire to restore its status as a great power and reclaim influence over the post-Soviet space. This strategy is underpinned by a combination of hard power projection, strategic opportunism, and ideological contestation of the Western-led liberal order (Karlsson, 2016; Qadri, 2024). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked critical junctures in post-Cold War international politics. These events represented flagrant violations of international law and sovereignty norms, triggering a recalibration of NATO's security architecture and prompting the imposition of comprehensive Western economic sanctions. These moves also signaled the end of the assumption that Russia would remain a status quo power in Europe (Mankoff, 2021). Russia's aggressive posture has led to a redefinition of European security

priorities, revitalizing NATO and prompting Finland and Sweden to seek membership in the alliance. Russia's strategic doctrine combines conventional force with hybrid warfare techniques, representing a sophisticated, multi-dimensional approach to conflict. Its use of cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, electoral interference, and paramilitary proxies allows it to operate below the threshold of conventional war, destabilizing adversaries while maintaining plausible deniability. Russian cyber interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and its use of private military contractors like the Wagner Group in Libya, Syria, and Africa illustrate this hybrid warfare model (Hall, 2013). Energy is a critical vector of Russian influence. As one of the world's largest producers of oil and natural gas, Russia utilizes its energy exports not only for economic gain but as a tool of geopolitical leverage, particularly in Europe. Prior to the Ukraine war, countries like Germany relied heavily on Russian gas through pipelines such as Nord Stream. The subsequent weaponization of energy in response to European support for Ukraine manifested in reduced gas supplies and price manipulation highlighted both the potency and limitations of Russia's energy diplomacy (Qadri, 2024).

In the global arena, Russia has actively sought to extend its influence beyond its traditional sphere, intervening in the Syrian civil war to protect the Assad regime, supporting rogue actors in Libya, and expanding economic and military ties in sub-Saharan Africa. These efforts reflect Moscow's broader objective of presenting itself as a counterweight to Western interventionism and a viable partner for authoritarian regimes (Hall, 2013). Additionally, Russia has developed a strategic partnership with China, driven by shared interests in undermining U.S. global leadership and promoting a multipolar world order. This alignment is visible in joint military exercises, diplomatic coordination, and shared technological development, especially in defense and surveillance. However, the partnership is inherently asymmetrical; China possesses greater economic and technological weight, and their collaboration often reflects tactical convergence rather than a unified grand strategy (Mankoff, 2021).

## 6. GPC AND THE ONGOING IRAN-ISRAEL ESCALATION

The protracting hostility between Iran and Israel stands as one of the most perilous and deeply rooted rivalries in the Middle East. This confrontation is underpinned by a convergence of ideological discord, strategic rivalry, and mutual anxieties over nuclear capabilities. While long embedded in regional competition and opposing political visions, the conflict has become increasingly shaped by the strategic interests of global powers. As the United States, China, and Russia intensify their engagement in

the Middle East, their actions and alignments are adding complexity to the Iran-Israel dynamic. These evolving external influences risk reinforcing misperceptions, escalating proxy confrontations, and further undermining the already fragile diplomatic mechanisms that once served as buffers to direct military conflict. This section explores the potential for escalation between Iran and Israel by analyzing the intersection of bilateral deterrence strategies, regional proxy engagements, nuclear apprehensions, and shifting patterns of great power involvement. Understanding this nexus is critical, particularly as strategic behaviors among major global players increasingly define the contours of regional conflict.

The relationship between Iran and Israel has long been governed by a precarious balance, one defined not by open warfare but by strategic deterrence and indirect confrontation. Iran has constructed a deterrence architecture grounded in asymmetric capabilities, emphasizing what scholars describe as “deterrence by denial.” This includes the deployment of ballistic missile systems, offensive cyber tools, and a wide-reaching network of proxy militias operating in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Gaza. These tools serve both to complicate Israel’s strategic calculations and to offer Iran plausible deniability in its operations. This decentralized approach not only disperses Iran’s deterrent capacity but also provides strategic depth in the face of Israeli military superiority (Maulana, 2024). In contrast, Israel relies on a doctrine of preemptive defense, leveraging its advanced military technology, intelligence capabilities, and capacity for rapid strike operations. This strategy is manifested through cyber-attacks, clandestine missions, and precision airstrikes designed to neutralize threats before they fully materialize. High-profile actions such as the 2020 assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, alongside recurring airstrikes on Iranian-aligned targets in Syria, exemplify this forward-leaning deterrence posture (Raine et al., 2024). Although these respective strategies have so far prevented a descent into open warfare, they are marked by inherent instability. The potential for misjudgment, third-party interference, or strategic miscalculations remains high particularly in an environment increasingly shaped by external great powers. The growing involvement of the U.S., China, and Russia does not merely shift the balance of power; it introduces new dimensions of risk and complexity. As these powers align with different sides, whether through arms sales, diplomatic support, or economic partnerships, their presence can exacerbate tensions, embolden actors, and hinder efforts at conflict de-escalation.

The conflict between Iran and Israel, long characterized by proxy warfare, cyber sabotage, and covert operations, entered an unprecedented phase in June 2025. On June 13, Israel initiated a series of high-

impact airstrikes deep within Iranian territory, striking not only military installations but also civilian infrastructure and suspected nuclear research facilities. These strikes reportedly resulted in the deaths of between 240 to over 600 individuals, including numerous civilians and high-ranking military. In retaliation, Iran launched a coordinated barrage of ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial systems targeting key Israeli sites. These included strategic military bases, vital energy infrastructure such as the Haifa oil refinery, and densely populated civilian areas. At least two dozen Israelis lost their lives in these retaliatory strikes, and hundreds more were injured. This sequence of attacks has transformed the longstanding animosity into a full-scale confrontation, significantly heightening the security challenges in the region. This conflict cannot be viewed in isolation; it is deeply enmeshed in the intensifying global power rivalry involving the United States, China, and Russia. The United States, as Israel’s principal ally, has continued to provide robust military and diplomatic support. This includes the deployment of air-defense systems, intelligence sharing, and high-level political endorsement that collectively embolden Israeli strategic behavior. Simultaneously, Iran has fortified its partnerships with China and Russia. These alignments reflect and reinforce broader patterns of great power competition. As Israeli decision-makers operate with implicit U.S. backing, Tehran draws confidence from its deepening ties with Moscow and Beijing, who have not only supplied key military components but also provided diplomatic cover in multilateral forums such as the United Nations. This bifurcation in support structures exacerbates the escalation, making it more difficult to isolate and resolve the bilateral conflict on its own. In addition, the failure of multilateral diplomacy, most notably the erosion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has contributed to the current crisis. Once a cornerstone of nuclear de-escalation and international cooperation, the JCPOA’s collapse has removed a vital channel for managing nuclear tensions. The fragmentation within the United Nations Security Council and divergent agendas among European allies further undermine crisis resolution efforts.

Although European actors have attempted to convene diplomatic dialogues, such as the recent exploratory talks in Geneva, these efforts remain fragile and inconclusive. Iran’s firm position that it will not negotiate while under military assault underscores a broader strategy of resistance. This posture, although rooted in a desire for sovereign integrity, complicates any attempt at compromise. Meanwhile, analysts suggest that the U.S. could still play a pivotal role in brokering a ceasefire if it pursues a balanced approach in addressing the conflict. The regional dimensions of the conflict are increasingly volatile. Armed non-state actors aligned with Iran including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Popular Mobilization



Forces in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen pose the risk of further regionalizing the war. These groups may be activated in response to Israeli aggression, thereby opening new fronts and intensifying the humanitarian and security crisis. Beyond the Middle East, the conflict threatens to destabilize global energy markets. The strategic Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for global oil transportation, could become a flashpoint, driving up oil prices and causing economic ripple effects across the world. Meanwhile, the growing reliance on unilateral military responses, in place of coordinated diplomacy, signals a dangerous erosion of international norms governing conflict resolution.

Addressing the escalating Iran–Israel conflict through the lens of great power competition necessitates a nuanced, cooperative, and multilateral strategy. The recent intensification of hostilities reached a critical juncture when the U.S. President Donald Trump, in a nationally televised address, announced that American forces had conducted extensive precision strikes against three of Iran’s principal nuclear facilities Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan. According to Trump, these operations aimed to eliminate Iran’s nuclear enrichment infrastructure and neutralize what he described as a grave nuclear threat posed by a regime that he labeled “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism.” The U.S. intervention represents a significant escalation, effectively transforming the conflict from a regional confrontation into an international crisis with global implications. While Israel initiated the assault on June 13 with targeted airstrikes against Iranian nuclear and military installations, Iran has since mounted a robust response. Its retaliatory campaign has included ballistic missile launches and drone strikes aimed at major Israeli population centers, signaling a dangerous spiral of tit-for-tat escalation. Iranian officials have made it clear that any direct involvement by the United States in the hostilities would trigger broader retaliation, potentially targeting U.S. assets and allies throughout the region. The entry of Washington into the conflict has heightened concerns within the international community that what began as a bilateral confrontation could rapidly escalate into a broader war possibly involving other great powers such as Russia and China, both of whom have strategic partnerships with Iran. In such a volatile context, the specter of a large-scale international war even the unthinkable prospect of a third world war can no longer be dismissed. The confluence of nuclear tensions, regional instability, and strategic rivalry among global powers underscores the urgent need for diplomatic restraint and collective crisis management. Ensuring that the conflict remains contained will require not only immediate de-escalation mechanisms but also a renewed commitment to rebuilding multilateral diplomatic platforms that have been weakened or paralyzed in recent years.

Ultimately, navigating this crisis demands more

than reactive military strategies. It calls for long-term strategic vision that incorporates diplomacy, arms control revitalization, and inclusive dialogue among regional stakeholders and great powers alike. First, sustained diplomatic leadership from the United States, China, Russia, and key European actors is essential to establish lines of communication and reduce strategic mistrust. Second, the revival or reinvention of a multilateral mechanism akin to the JCPOA could serve as a platform for managing nuclear tensions and reintroducing transparency. Equally important is the need for both Iran and Israel to demonstrate measured restraint. This includes halting direct military operations and committing to internationally mediated dialogues that prioritize de-confliction and humanitarian protections. Such efforts must be backed by incentives and guarantees that address each side’s core security concerns.

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## 7. IMPLICATIONS OF GPC ON GLOBAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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The reemergence of GPC represents a profound transformation in the structure and dynamics of global security. From the decay of cooperative institutions and the proliferation of hybrid threats, to an arms race and technological fragmentation, the global system is becoming more volatile and fragmented. Ideological divergence and strategic polarization further limit collective responses to pressing transnational challenges. The various implications of GPC on global security can be discussed as follow;

### 7.1 Decline of Multilateral Institutions and Erosion of Cooperative Norms

The resurgence of GPC has significantly weakened the efficacy and legitimacy of international institutions once central to global governance and collective security. Bodies like the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO), and various arms control frameworks increasingly struggle to function amid strategic rivalries among major powers. The strategic interests of the United States, China, and Russia often bypass multilateral platforms in favor of unilateral or small-group (minilateral) actions, leading to institutional paralysis and an erosion of rules-based cooperation (Mankoff, 2020; Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Illustratively, the UN Security Council has been rendered ineffective on issues such as the Syrian conflict and Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, primarily due to vetoes by China and Russia. Similarly, the WTO faces diminished authority, hindered by U.S. objections to China’s trade practices and the prolonged blockage of appellate appointments (Hopewell, 2021). This regression toward power-centric diplomacy signals a broader weakening of the cooperative architecture underpinning global stability.

## 7.2 Heightened Risk of Military Escalation

Strategic competition among great powers has intensified military tensions, especially in flashpoints such as the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, Eastern Europe, and the Arctic. The buildup of military assets and increased frequency of high-risk maneuvers ranging from naval interceptions to airspace intrusions heightens the probability of unintended escalations (Vuving, 2020; Fravel, 2019). Incidents involving close military contact, particularly between the U.S. and China, risk spiraling into broader conflicts. Meanwhile, Russia's invasion of Ukraine illustrates a willingness to use conventional force to reshape geopolitical realities (Zendelovski, 2024; Charap & Colton, 2017). As arms control agreements deteriorate, the absence of stabilizing mechanisms increases the potential for crisis mismanagement and inter-state conflict.

## 7.3 Rise of Hybrid and Asymmetric Threats

The nature of competition has evolved beyond traditional warfare, with states employing hybrid strategies such as cyber intrusions, disinformation, economic coercion, and the deployment of proxy actors, to undermine adversaries without direct confrontation (Zendelovski, 2024; Galeotti, 2016). Russia's interference in electoral processes, manipulation of energy supplies, and deployment of mercenary groups (e.g., Wagner Group) reflect a strategic preference for asymmetric influence. China, too, has adopted similar tactics through cyber operations and transnational influence campaigns targeting diaspora communities and narratives around Taiwan (Creemers, 2017). These grey zone tactics exploit legal ambiguities and strain the defensive capacities of liberal democracies.

## 7.4 Arms Race and the Breakdown of Strategic Restraint

The competitive dynamics of GPC are fueling a renewed global arms race. Major Powers are heavily investing in advanced military technologies including hypersonic missiles, AI-driven systems, and space-based capabilities while longstanding arms control agreements, such as the INF Treaty and New START, face collapse or inaction (Stokes & Hsiao, 2020; Acton, 2021). China's accelerating military modernization, along with Russia's deployment of novel strategic weapons like the Avangard hypersonic system, reflect a shift toward deterrence through technological superiority (Fravel, 2019; Zendelovski, 2024). The lack of updated, inclusive arms control mechanisms undermines mutual transparency and increases risks of misperception and rapid escalation.

## 7.5 Bloc Formation and Strategic Polarization

Global politics is becoming increasingly defined by competing geopolitical alliances. The strategic bifurcation into opposing blocs anchored respectively by the U.S. and its allies, and by the growing Sino-Russian axis is reshaping alignments in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Fravel,

2019; Doshi, 2021). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its expanding influence in infrastructure development across Africa and Central Asia are often accompanied by political conditions and strategic expectations. Concurrently, the United States has bolstered partnerships like the Quad and AUKUS to balance Chinese regional dominance. This emergent bloc-based world order diminishes the space for non-alignment and weakens multilateralism, narrowing diplomatic maneuverability for third-party states.

## 7.6 Normative Rivalries and Ideological Fractures

GPC is not solely a contest over resources or territory, it also embodies a fundamental ideological divergence. The U.S. promotes a liberal order centered on democracy, human rights, and international law, while China and Russia champion alternative governance models rooted in sovereignty, non-interference, and authoritarian resilience (Müller, 2024; Deibler, 2020). These ideological fault lines are evident in debates within multilateral settings, such as disagreements over digital governance, censorship, and peacekeeping principles. China's advocacy for "cyber sovereignty" and Russia's emphasis on a "multipolar world" represent concerted challenges to liberal universalism. As emerging powers weigh these competing models, international norms and institutions are increasingly pulled in divergent directions.

## 7.7 Technological Decoupling and Security Risks

Perhaps the most disruptive manifestation of GPC is the fragmentation of the global technology ecosystem. Strategic competition in fields like semiconductors, quantum computing, 5G, and artificial intelligence has led to a bifurcation of technological standards and supply chains (Rahman, 2025). The United States has adopted export controls, sanctions, and industrial policies to curtail Chinese access to key technologies, including measures under the CHIPS Act. In response, China has prioritized self-reliance through massive investments in indigenous innovation. This technological decoupling is undermining interoperability, increasing cybersecurity threats, and causing widespread disruption across global markets (Stango, 2024).

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## 8. CONCLUSION

The intensifying strategic competition among the United States, China, and Russia is fundamentally reshaping the global security architecture. In this emerging era of Great Power Competition (GPC), the geopolitical landscape is defined not by cooperation or shared global governance, but by fragmentation, strategic polarization, and militarized rivalry. The post-Cold War aspiration for a cohesive, rules-based international order is giving way to a multipolar reality characterized by the formation of rival blocs, conflicting governance models, and increasingly

divergent foreign policy objectives. A primary casualty of this strategic transformation is the weakening of multilateral institutions that historically underpinned global order. Institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and various regional security bodies are now frequently paralyzed by power struggles among their most influential members. On issues ranging from arms control and conflict prevention to digital policy and humanitarian intervention, consensus is often elusive, giving rise to a more unilateral and transactional mode of international engagement. This shift signals a return to classical realist principles, where state interests, power balancing, and competitive advantage shape diplomatic behavior more than collective norms or legal frameworks.

The implications for global security are broad and complex. Foremost is the heightened risk of military confrontation, whether accidental or deliberate. In strategically volatile regions including the Indo-Pacific, Eastern Europe, the middle-east, and the Arctic, the proliferation of military assets, frequent naval maneuvers, and aggressive signaling heighten the potential for escalation. The dismantling of arms control regimes, notably the collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, removes critical mechanisms that previously helped manage great power tensions and maintain strategic stability. Moreover, the evolution of hybrid warfare comprising cyber intrusions, disinformation, and economic coercion has profoundly altered the nature of conflict. These non-kinetic forms of competition erode traditional distinctions between war and peace, complicating detection, attribution, and response. States like Russia have institutionalized such tactics as part of broader coercive strategies, while China increasingly integrates these approaches into its own playbook. These methods exploit societal vulnerabilities in democratic states, exacerbate political polarization, and challenge conventional defense postures.

In addition, the race for technological dominance has emerged as a central axis of contemporary GPC. Strategic competition over artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and space technology is reshaping global power structures and security doctrines. This technological rivalry is not only redefining military capabilities but also transforming global markets, digital infrastructure, and the rules that govern innovation and information. Fragmented supply chains and the erosion of universal digital standards signal the broader economic and normative consequences of this techno-strategic contest. GPC also exacerbates global strategic fragmentation, particularly for middle powers and states in the Global South. These nations increasingly find themselves navigating a geopolitical environment marked by competing patronage systems and diverging norms. While alignment with one bloc may yield material or security benefits, it also risks estrangement from others, thereby reducing strategic

autonomy. The resulting diplomatic pragmatism often undermines unified responses to shared transnational threats such as climate change, pandemics, and nuclear proliferation issues that inherently require inclusive and sustained international cooperation.

Against this backdrop, rethinking global security demands a deeper understanding of GPC's structural drivers and adaptive consequences. Policymakers and scholars alike must confront a global system where cooperative mechanisms coexist with competitive rivalries, and where the stability once afforded by U.S. unipolarity is no longer assured. The development of resilient and responsive international institutions capable of absorbing shocks, mediating conflicts, and facilitating cooperation is now more essential than ever. Ultimately, the resurgence of great power politics signifies more than a temporary geopolitical recalibration, it represents a profound reordering of the international system. Responding to its challenges requires not only the revitalization of diplomacy and multilateralism but also innovative strategies for managing strategic competition without precipitating systemic breakdown. If the international community is to navigate this complex terrain, it must prioritize dialogue, invest in confidence-building measures, and seek flexible yet robust frameworks for global governance. Only through such efforts can the destabilizing effects of GPC be mitigated and a path toward a more stable and cooperative international future be realized.

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