

America and China: Towards a Reshaping of the Global Order?

(Translated)

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Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the emergence of a unipolar world, America, leading the Western bloc, has sought to contain Russia, encircle its periphery, and reduce it to a state without even regional influence. It attempted to neutralize Russia's nuclear arsenal and intercontinental ballistic missiles, and fomented unrest in its vicinity, culminating in its involvement in a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Simultaneously, America sought to subdue China and confine it behind its Great Wall, viewing it only as a vast market to be exploited and a human giant to be tamed. Despite this, China, with its strength and resources, has managed to become a regional superpower, possessing veto power in the Security Council and harboring growing regional ambitions. Indeed, today it stands as an economic giant, possessing all the attributes of a major power.

Is China rising to replace America and assume its position as the sole leader of the global order, especially given the recent surge in talk about the decline of the American empire? Or are we heading towards a multipolar world, as many thinkers and analysts suggest? Does the concept of the Cold War, which prevailed during the Soviet era, accurately describe the relationship between America and China? Or are they on a path to reshaping the international order, despite the uproar surrounding tariffs?

Before answering these questions, it's essential to point out that understanding the ongoing transformations in the international order will not be accurate if we rely solely on the traditional concepts that governed the 20th century, especially the rigidly binary concept of the Cold War between two opposing poles separated by a rigid, ostensibly steel wall and a near-complete economic barrier. The current landscape doesn't reflect a sudden collapse or a resounding fall of a dominant power, but rather a gradual erosion of the unipolar hegemonic structure that emerged after 1991, and a slow shift towards an imperfect order where power centers overlap and the instruments of influence are distributed among economics, technology, the military, and proxy warfare, as will be explained later.

At the heart of this transformation lie three major circles, directly related to the reasons that have made Iran a strategic disruptive force and a focal point of international divergence, creating a new form of cold war unlike anything we have seen before. The Operation Al-Aqsa Flood events constituted a historical turning point in the international struggle for the Middle East, drawing the world's attention to the reality of the unilateral hegemony supporting the Jewish entity, which successive events have mired in the region's quagmire within a multi-front war of attrition. In 2014, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades staged their largest military parade ever, showcasing, for the first time, drones, scuba units, and new missiles and rockets. However, the message that some failed to grasp at the time was Abu Ubaida's expression of gratitude to Iran.

The three circles we are discussing are as follows: the network of indirect support between China and Iran, the escalating military-technical alliance between Russia and Iran, and the limits of American power as reflected in reports from Western strategic think tanks.

China and Iran: Structural Empowerment Within the Global Order

In this context, the relationship between China and Iran stands out as a prime example of this new pattern of international interaction. It is not a direct military alliance, but instead a form of silent structural empowerment operating within the global system rather than outside of it. This is reinforced by the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two countries, signed in March 2021. This 25-year cooperation framework aims to bolster economic and security ties, with Beijing committing \$400 billion in investments in the oil, gas, and infrastructure sectors in exchange for a steady and discounted supply of Iranian oil. This provides a lifeline for Iran in the face of US sanctions.

On the other hand, data from the US Energy Information Administration indicates the continued flow of Iranian oil to Asian markets, particularly China, through complex networks of intermediaries and mechanisms to circumvent sanctions. This flow is not merely a trade exchange; it constitutes a vital economic balancing factor that enables Iran to maintain a minimum level of financial stability despite Western pressure. Meanwhile, US Treasury Department reports reveal supply networks for dual-use electronic components and technologies, including microchips, communications equipment, and navigation systems, which are being repurposed to develop unconventional military capabilities, particularly drones. Notably, this process does not involve direct arms transfers, but instead gray supply chains that allow technology to move between civilian and military uses without direct legal violation.

US officials also told The New York Times that Chinese companies have shipped dual-use materials to Iran, materials suitable for both civilian and military purposes. The officials stated that China is pursuing a policy of caution regarding a potential war with Iran and has not taken a firm stance due to its multiple objectives.

On a technological level, the expansion of China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), as documented in studies by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, reflects a deeper shift in the global power structure. Navigation systems are no longer the exclusive domain of a single power but have become part of a multipolar space that allows for the global redistribution of technological power without direct confrontation. In this context, whether or not the US intelligence reports confirming that China provided Iran with satellite imagery of US military targets in the Gulf region are accurate, the Chinese role cannot be understood as direct military support for Iran. Instead, it is a gradual reshaping of the global power structure from within the system itself. It is crucial to note the transformation of commercial space technology into a dual-use asset, capable of being integrated into complex regional conflict environments. This reshapes the nature of intelligence and operational awareness in the region and impacts the precision of military operations. This may explain why Iran has been able to damage and destroy more than 228 buildings or pieces of equipment at US military sites since the start of the war, according to Washington Post analyses.

This dynamic in the relationship between the two countries is thus linked to Iran's stance within Chinese strategy. The relationship between Beijing and Tehran is a cornerstone of the Belt and Road Initiative, as Iran constitutes a geographical crossroads between Central Asia and the Middle East, a vital energy and trade corridor. This directly clashes with the US theory of dominating strategic bottlenecks within its expansionist policies. Herein lies the fundamental paradox: China did not enter the crisis as a confrontational power, but as a managing one. It did not seek to alter the balance of power militarily, but rather to adapt to it and utilize it politically. This reflects a difference in the philosophy of power within the global order.

Russia and Iran: From Political Intersection to Military-Industrial Integration

While China exerts its influence through the global economic and technological infrastructure, Russia represents the most overt reshaping of the logic of power through direct military integration.

Since the war in Ukraine, the relationship between Moscow and Tehran has transformed from limited cooperation to an advanced model of military-industrial integration. Reports published by agencies such as Reuters and other international media outlets, as well as the Institute for Science and International Security, indicate the transfer of Iranian HESA Shahed 136 drones to widespread use in the Russian military, followed by the development of local production within Russia under the name “Geran-2” at industrial facilities in Tatarstan. This shift from supply to joint production reflects a transformation of the relationship from a level of mutual benefit to a deeper level of sharing combat technology.

Similarly, reports from the US Department of Defense indicate cooperation in the areas of guidance systems and electronic warfare, reflecting a genuine transfer of military expertise between the two parties, rather than a mere traditional buying and selling relationship.

Thus, the Russian-Iranian relationship is becoming closer to a model of a functional military alliance aimed at redistributing the instruments of power within the international system, rather than forming a principled or political alliance in the classical sense. In this context, we must not forget the historic visit of Russian President Putin to Beijing and his meeting with his Chinese counterpart on February 2, 2022, where the two countries, Russia and China, announced in a joint statement the unity of their positions in the face of American hegemony and called for international multipolarity and said that a new era in international relations had been launched.

America and China: Supremacy Within the Limits of Structural Attrition

In the face of the gradual formation of multiple power centers, America is attempting to maintain its position as the strongest military and technological power in the international order. However, this supremacy is no longer absolute, as it was during the 1990s, and America's decline is no longer a secret to those concerned with international affairs.

Analysis by the RAND Corporation between 2022 and 2024 confirmed a growing gap between the scale of American military commitments in high-intensity conflict scenarios and the production capacity of the defense industry, particularly in the areas of munitions and long-range missiles. The RAND Corporation also believes that the world has entered a phase of persistent competition below the threshold of war. This is a very important description because it means that conflict continues without direct war, while avoiding nuclear escalation, and this war of attrition undoubtedly contributes to the erosion of the powers involved in this existential struggle, foremost among them America, which carries the banner of defending a faltering Western civilization. Studies by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) indicate that the nature of modern warfare, based on the extensive use of drones and low-cost systems, is placing increasing pressure on the traditional, costly model of American military superiority. The United States also finds itself facing multifaceted competition encompassing technology, supply chains, space, artificial intelligence, and geopolitical influence.

Similarly, the Brookings Institution argues that the American challenge is no longer solely military, but has become structural, involving the management of a vast network of global commitments simultaneously, amidst escalating competition with China and the resurgence of Russia as a powerful military force that has withstood all Western attempts to weaken it in the Ukrainian quagmire.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) asserts that while American supremacy remains, it is no longer sufficient to guarantee stable hegemony. Instead, it has become a supremacy contingent upon a sustained capacity to manage strategic dispersal.

Furthermore, analyses published in the New York Times and Foreign Policy in May 2026 indicate that the ongoing shifts in the international power structure reflect not merely a gradual adjustment within a unipolar system, but rather deeper indicators of a slow reshaping of the very concept of hegemony. On the one hand, American policies reveal an expansion of foreign commitments that sometimes exceeds the capacity to manage them effectively, reflecting increasing strategic fatigue for the dominant power and diminishing the effectiveness of the traditional hegemonic model. On the other hand, the decline in reliance on soft power in favor of coercive and hard power tools indicates a diminished capacity to generate influence through attraction and acceptance. This weakens one of the cornerstones of the liberal order that America has led since the end of the Cold War. America's image has gradually eroded, and this erosion accelerated with the Strait of Hormuz crisis, a development that captured the attention of international public opinion. This led the German Chancellor to declare that Washington had been humiliated by Iranian negotiators.

Within this tense context, American policy toward Iran stands out as a direct extension of the long-term logic of strategic containment. Reuters reported on May 2, 2026, citing a White House official, that US President Donald Trump had proposed extending the sanctions imposed on Iran for several more months, with the aim of crippling its oil exports and pushing Tehran toward signing a new agreement. This approach comes amidst ongoing American pressure, and European diplomatic assessments suggest that the current situation is likely to persist for an extended period without any imminent breakthrough. Thus, Trump continued to employ every means of military and diplomatic pressure, clinging to the hope of reaching a final and comprehensive agreement with Iranian representatives, all to no avail.

This development, the extension of the sanctions, is not an isolated event, but rather reflects a consistent strategic pattern based on using sanctions as a tool for managing conflict within the gray zone—that is, without sliding into direct military confrontation, but also without allowing for a final stabilization of the relationship. Nevertheless, the Trump administration was forced to engage in two direct military operations against Iran, Operation Midnight Hammer in the summer of 2025 and Operation Epic Fury in the spring of 2026, yet it failed to achieve the desired results, just as it failed to do so through negotiations, which often amounted to a political maneuver to deceive and mask the military targeting.

These successive setbacks have forced Trump to travel to China with a humiliated face for a summit that was originally postponed due to the war. Media reports indicate that the Iranian issue and the Strait of Hormuz will be at the heart of the discussions. In other words, it will be a summit of supplication to China as a mediator capable of easing tensions and resolving conflicts. This reflects a profound and unprecedented weakness in managing Middle Eastern crises.

Nevertheless, Trump described his visit to China as very important, asserting that matters are going very well with Beijing, or so he pretended during the small business summit at the White House.

The rare face-to-face meeting had been scheduled for May 14 and 15, according to the White House. Several sources indicate that Beijing saw the summit as a unique opportunity to establish a more stable long-term relationship with its biggest economic and military rival, according to CNN.

Contemporary Strategic Thought: From Unipolarity to Intermediate Politics

In light of these transformations, what we are witnessing is not a new cold war, but rather a historical shift towards a more fluid and less closed, multipolar network. Furthermore, the rise of Eastern powers and the decline of Western powers cannot be described as a change in the structure of the international order or a dismantling of its foundations, despite the erosion of international legitimacy, the decline in confidence in international law, and the challenge to the Westphalian system itself in the wake of the Greenland dispute. The reason is that competition from within the capitalist order and under its umbrella does not change the system or abolish its unjust laws. Instead, it maintains it as a capitalist order that fulfills the needs of the major capitalists and serves its transnational interests. Furthermore, the decline in the performance of this order does not necessarily mean that it faces imminent collapse. It simply means that its performance has become weak and incapable of meeting growing human needs, even basic needs at times, foremost among them food security and internal security, which are essential conditions for achieving comprehensive stability. Humanity will only attain this stability under a divine system that addresses human problems as human beings and fills this deadly strategic void. Allah (swt) says, **﴿فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ * الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ﴾** **“So let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them against hunger and made them safe from fear”** [TMQ Surah Quraysh: 4].

This qualitative shift, resulting from the nature of the capitalist system itself and then from America's policies within it, has not escaped the attention of the most prominent theorists of international relations. Charles Krauthammer described the unipolar moment as an exceptional historical phase, not a permanent system. Fareed Zakaria argued that the world is witnessing the rise of others rather than the fall of the United States, meaning a global redistribution of power. Graham Allison proposed the concept of the “Thucydides Trap” to explain the structural friction between rising and dominant powers. Henry Kissinger offered the most accurate description before his death in late 2023, observing that the international order had entered a transitional phase where the old order was no longer viable, but a new one had yet to emerge. Paul Kennedy's thesis remains a fundamental reference point on the rise and fall of great powers, as he established his assertion that when a state's military commitments exceed its economic capacity to bear them, strategic failure becomes inevitable. This may explain why the United States recently reduced its overseas military commitments by hinting at a possible withdrawal from NATO, a prelude to withdrawing troops from European countries such as Germany, Italy, and Spain.

However, Europeans recognize that Trump's threat to withdraw from NATO is not serious. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated that America remains a cornerstone of the alliance despite differing viewpoints, downplaying tensions with Trump following Washington's announcement of troop reductions in Germany. In an interview with the German network ARD, Merz added, “I remain convinced that the Americans are the most important partner for us in the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO).”

The capitalist system was designed to serve a handful of capitalists, causing immense suffering, wars, and epidemics among the people, who toil and labor only to witness misery and hardship. The world will remain plundered of its resources, stripped of its will, and deprived of its dignity, foreshadowing the demise of this system that has brought misery to all of humanity. Allah (swt) said, **﴿قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى اللَّهَ بُنْيَانُهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّقْفُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَاهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾** **“Those before them plotted, but Allah struck at the very foundations of their building, so the roof fell upon them from above, and the punishment came upon them from where they did not expect”** [TMQ Surah An-Nahl: 26]. We are therefore facing an intermediate stage, in which the major powers are politically balanced and are converging by necessity, in accordance with the the words of Allah (swt)

who said, ﴿بِأْسِهِمْ بَيْنَهُمْ شَدِيدٌ تَحْسَبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّى﴾ **“Their mutual conflict is severe among themselves. You would think they are united, but their hearts are divided”** [TMQ Surah Al-Hashr: 14]. This coincides with a difficult labor that the Ummah of Islam is experiencing, in preparation for changing the international order based on its Aqeedah and its civilizational vision stemming from the great ideology of Islam, because it is simply an Ummah that commands all goodness (المعروف al-Ma'roof) and forbids all evil (المنكر al-Munkar), and it is the only Ummah that possesses a political and civilizational alternative capable of seizing the initiative from the capitalist countries and bringing humanity out of darkness into light.

In Summary: A World Order That Is Forming, But Not in Completion

At the heart of this new formation stands the United States as the most prominent military power in the global order, possessing the broadest network of security alliances, most notably NATO. However, this dominance today is not at all what it was after the end of the Cold War. It now operates within the confines of strategic attrition and multiple fronts, leading to a state of geopolitical strain and strategic exhaustion. Washington no longer faces a single adversary, but instead a set of simultaneous challenges: the rise of China as a major economic and technological power capable of shaping the battlefield without claiming its flag; the return of Russia as a direct military actor capable of influencing European balances; and the growing roles of regional powers like Iran, which operates not only as a traditional state but also as a network of influence extending across multiple arenas, in contrast to the decline of transatlantic alliances.

In this context, China represents the new center of global economic gravity. It does not compete with the United States through direct military confrontation, but rather by reshaping the infrastructure of the global economy, supply chains, technology, and finance. Through tools such as connectivity projects, digital infrastructure, and alternative navigation systems, Beijing seeks to expand its influence within the existing system rather than break away from it, thus positioning itself as a rising power within the system, not outside of it.

Russia, on the other hand, represents the model of a disruptive power that relies not on economic superiority, but on military and deterrent capabilities and the perpetuation of instability in strategic regions. This is evident in its direct presence in Ukraine, its military presence in Syria, albeit diminishing, and its varying forms of indirect influence in Libya and some Sahel countries. This influence is multifaceted, combining a limited military presence, informal security networks, and shifting political influence.

In contrast, Iran represents a completely different model, combining a centralized state with an irregular, asymmetric regional network. It operates not only within its borders but also through political and military extensions in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and other arenas, making it a quintessential network actor. In the case of Iran and the Gulf specifically, American strategic logic is not limited to the idea of state ownership, but revolves around preventing any regional power from transforming its sensitive geographical location, particularly its indirect control over the Strait of Hormuz, into a tool for geopolitical blackmail that could affect global energy and trade flows. Even more dangerous is the possibility of the region slipping from the grasp of colonial powers, allowing control to return to the hands of the people, enabling them to seize the reins of power and turn the tables on their adversaries in a short time.

Iran, which overlooks the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea to the south, and lies at the crossroads of energy, trade, and major conflicts, has direct access to Central Asia and the Caucasus to the north. This region is of paramount importance. Strategically, it represents an extension of Russia into Asia and even the Middle East, with no natural borders separating it from Russia—no seas or oceans. Similarly, for China, the region

serves as its back door. Given that the majority of the region's inhabitants are Muslim, China fears their influence on Muslims in East Turkestan. Given this strategic importance, America has formulated plans since the collapse of the Soviet Union to enter the region and contain Russia on the one hand, and to encircle China and prevent its expansion into neighboring countries on the other.

Amid these power dynamics, Europe occupies a unique position, especially in the face of increasing American pressure. It is a major economic power with significant financial and industrial weight, but at the same time, it is heavily dependent on America for security through NATO. This situation makes it a strategically incomplete power—economically effective, but militarily and politically incomplete on the global stage. While some of its countries, such as France and Germany, strive to build a concept of European strategic independence, this project remains limited by the reality of internal differences in European priorities and the structural dependence on the American security umbrella.

In this scenario, Europe does not appear as an independent pole in the traditional sense, but rather as an economic power within a security order led by another state actor. Simultaneously, it is a key arena where the repercussions of the conflict between major powers intersect, particularly concerning energy and European security, which are directly linked to the war in Ukraine and the reshaping of relations with Russia. This makes Europe's national security, in its broadest sense, a threat.

When these elements are combined, it becomes clear that the international order is no longer based on a clear bipolarity, or even a stable multipolarity, but rather on a hybrid transitional structure: the United States as a military and alliance center, China as a rising economic power, Russia as a disruptive military force, Iran as a networked regional actor, and Europe as an economic power with incomplete strategic independence. Thus, we can say that we are living through an incomplete redistribution of power within an interconnected global system, where absolute control is no longer possible, and complete independence is unattainable. Instead, balances are being formed within a dense network of interdependence and constant competition, as if we are experiencing a state of historical suspension. This is, in reality, a historic and golden opportunity for the Muslim World to reclaim its usurped authority, regain its leading role in the world, and activate its dormant potential to build a new international order that will deliver humanity from the hell of capitalism.

In conclusion, America and China are vying for the triumph of a false civilization in a world in crisis on all fronts and at all levels. The Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate), which will spread goodness throughout the world, will return soon, Allah willing. This is a historical and doctrinal inevitability, proclaimed by the political reality in every corner of the world, as humanity searches for a way out that will save it from the delusion, misery, and wretchedness of capitalism. Therefore, the Islamic Ummah, under the leadership of Hizb ut Tahrir (حزب التحرير Party of Liberation), is destined for a clear victory, by the Permission of Allah (swt), a victory that will only be truly fulfilled with the liberation of the land of the Isra and Mi'raj, the Blessed Land of Palestine, from the defilement of the Jews and the conquest of Rome, just as Constantinople was conquered, by the Permission of Allah (swt). Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ **“And on that day the believers will rejoice * in the victory of Allah. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful”** [TMQ Surah Ar-Rum: 4-5].