

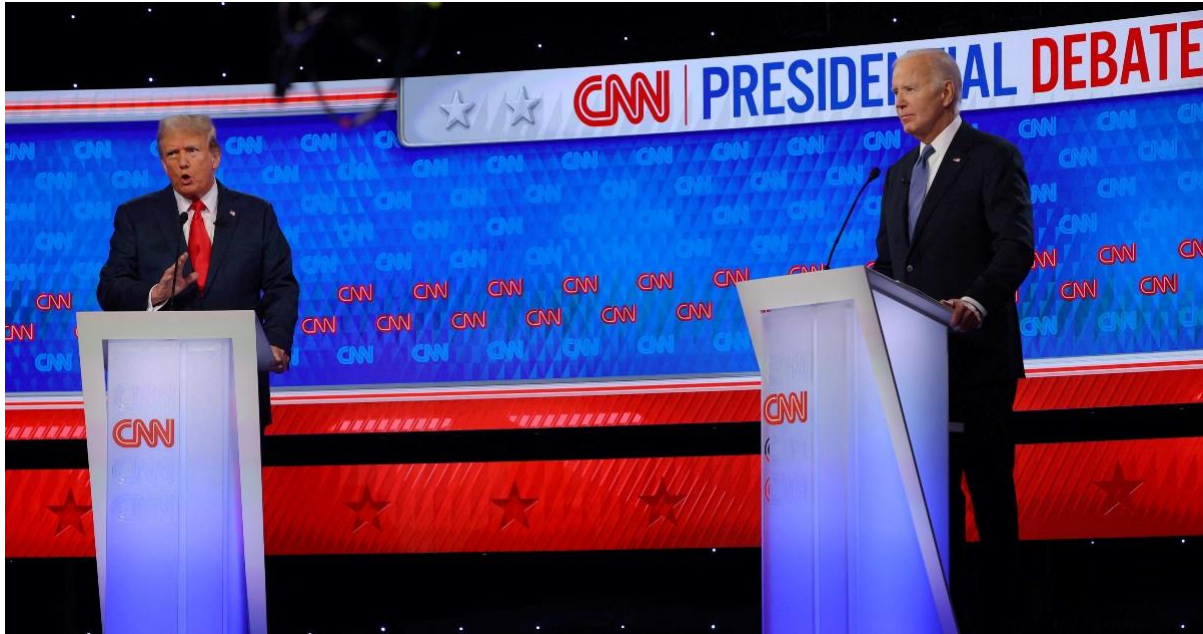
Great Power Externalities Return to Dominate

For EJInsight

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Three streams of regional events for the past two fortnights converged to return geopolitical pivoting to dominance.

Joe Biden's TV debate with Donald Trump on June 25, the first of scheduled two rounds, went calamitous with his faltering appearances. His camp was in panic and divide about whether he should call it a day; but he and his family insist that he will stay in the race, with him telling his ABC interviewer afterwards that he would beat Trump "the pathological liar" and asking, "who's gonna be able in a position where... we're at least checkmating China now" except him. He just told his fellow Democrats that "it is time to come together, move forward as a unified party, and defeat Donald Trump" under him.

Over the weekend in France, President Emmanuel Macron seems to have pulled off a trick over his hastily called National Assembly snap elections. In response to his appeal, the far-left and the Marconian centre alliance stood in solidarity and repelled Marine le Pen's far-right National Rally into a less menacing third place, despite the latter having emerged a front-runner with one-third of the popular votes for the first round a week before.

Then came Britain's parliamentary election on July 4, in which the governing Conservative party of 14 years took humiliating drubbing and handed the opposition Labour Party a landslide. (This column gave a focused anticipative perspective to the event about a fortnight ago.)

To this column, all these parochial happenings are to be gauged in terms of overriding externalities of great power rivalries among the United States, China and Russia.

Thus viewed, Biden's botched but persevering electioneering resonates far beyond American borders given his country's status as the incumbent superpower, while the elections in France and Britain are little more than continued episodes of the event series which evolve and develop in response to the tri-power exogeneity.

So much so that David Lammy, new British Foreign Secretary, merely recited a US State secretary's line when he stated that Britain's policy on China will be under a complete audit to determine "where we will need to compete, where we can cooperate and where we will need to challenge."

Paraphrased: the non-great powers will have to be positioned and re-positioned to the changing tonalities of the great power relations.

A New York times guest essay last month questions how the United States is still behaving as if it remained the world leader calling the shots around while in fact it is no more. "Never in the decades since the Cold War has the United States looked less like a leader of the world and more like the head of a faction — reduced to defending its preferred side against increasingly aligned adversaries, as much of the world looks on and wonders why the Americans think they're in charge." So said Stephen Wertheim, the author of the opinion piece and a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

In the meantime, there is no lacking those who, like Robert O'Brien, President Trump's one-time National Security Adviser, insist in his latest Foreign Affairs contribution that "Washington should, in fact, seek to decouple its economy from China's." Understandably, O'Brien blames Beijing's economic growth and military buildup for the has-to-be hawkishness. The way he puts it, "as China seeks to undermine American economic and military strength, Washington should return the favour."

Doesn't this sound like Washington has been paying lip service by claiming that they do not intend to block China's growth and that they would look to cooperate with Beijing where it is in the US interest, such as on climate change, fentanyl and nuclear stockpiling? It probably does, but welcome to the real world of Double Truths.

As long as Washington keeps treating China this way, in spite of Russia's steadily strengthened position in Ukraine with Beijing's propping, of world-wide competitiveness of the Chinese EVs and legacy chips, and of its surprising ability to besiege Taiwan instantly and effectively following the renegade island's de facto declaration of independence on May 20, the rest of the world, Europe and Britain included, will have little hope of self-determination and internal adequacy but get adjusted for what is likely to come next from the fighting elephants, for good or bad.

Many observers have compared the current US-China rivalry to the contest between the established British Empire and emerging Germany in the run-up to WWI. The latest of such observations ran in Foreign Affairs website mid last month, in which Yale historian Professor Odd Arne Westad blames both then Britons and Germans for their "ahistorical view" and "tunnel vision" with which they "sleepwalked" over the cliff.

"Structure is not destiny", says Professor Westad, "but it takes human avarice and ineptitude on a colossal scale for disaster to ensue."

In the positive spirit of applied history, a note of caution seems to have been sounded in Beijing, drawing on the richness of its unique civilizational history and determined to leave no stones unturned in order not to fall into the traps which crippled the rise of the 2nd Reich. This can be seen, for one thing, in a recently wide cited media disclosure that President Xi of China once confided to

Ursula von der Leyen President of the EU that Washington had tried to goad China into war over Taiwan but he would not take the bait. Washington denied it, of course.

For America, however, its thinly veiled strategic anxiety remains unallayed: China's momentous rise built upon the requisite industrial and technological prowess seems unstoppable short of war.

This is not to say that China does not have its share of problems. It does, and dauntingly hefty as a matter of fact. But the point here is that, even if the Beltway elite in Washington purportedly is adamant about repressing China's peaceful growth by killing economics, they know that economic laws dictate nevertheless.

As long as militarily striking down Beijing without being badly burnt is a prohibitive impossibility, Adam Smith's principles will, more likely than not, propel the sales of China made goods in the world market and channel them into amalgamation of Beijing's wealth and power.

Or, a down-to-earth proposal recently made by Jake Werner, a Quincy Institute researcher, to let the Chinese products and technologies into America and then "steal the IPs", allegedly as China did before, makes more sense than that put forward by Monsieur Robert O'brien and his likes?

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