2
The Proto-Peer Competitor and the Hegemon

The Sino-US strategic maneuvers are quite intricate, frequently changing, and global in scope. China’s internal balancing – military modernization – has not only been an issue of constant attention on the part of the US military, but it is also being watched with concern by its Asian neighbors. In its global search to acquire energy sources and in order to expand its global trade, the PRC has been carrying out a variety of strategic maneuvers in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. In the process, it has initiated massive economic assistance programs – especially in Africa and Latin America – to expand its sphere of influence. All of these maneuvers fall under the rubric of soft balancing and selective cooperation. Toward the United States, China has been carrying out maneuvers of competition, soft balancing, selective cooperation and cooptation on such wide-ranging issues as ‘six-party talks’, global economic issues, and in explaining the rationale for its increasing presence in Latin America.

Given the significance of the United States (US) to all three great powers of this study, and given how central the dynamics of US-China relations are to China’s own ties with Russia and India, it is essential to understand the modalities of Sino-US ties. The ups and downs of relations between these two powers, more than the US ties with Russia and India, would increase or diminish the significance of cooperation between China and Russia, and, along with it, the prospects of the emergence of a multipolar global power arrangement. It is imperative to understand China’s attitude toward the US in order to comprehend its long-range and short-term options.

What drives Sino-US competition?

Perhaps the best way to understand the Chinese perspectives on the United States is to examine them through the prism of China’s grand...
strategy. In that grand strategy, the United States serves as a model of utmost development, dynamism, and power. Two important features of China’s grand strategy are the notion of ‘comprehensive national power’ (CNP) and its ‘configuration of power’ or ‘shi’.

There is no consensus among the Chinese strategic thinkers as to what topics should be included in the CNP. However, factors like economic prosperity, diplomatic influence, national prestige, domestic cohesiveness, military capability, cultural influence, and science and