



**Ryan Hass, *Stronger: Adapting America's China Strategy in an Age of Competitive Interdependence* (London: Yale University Press, 2021).**

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The shifting balance of power has once again marked the onset of great-power rivalry which has ignited the debate around reorienting United States' foreign policy. The book *Stronger: Adapting America's China Strategy in an Age of*

*Competitive Interdependence* is a recent take on American foreign policy vis-à-vis China. The book is authored by Ryan Hass who has served as Director for China at the National Security Council as well as Foreign Service Officer in US Embassy, Beijing.

In 240 pages, the author analyses the US-China relationship and proposes a framework regarding how Washington should recalibrate its foreign policy when it comes to Beijing. In the initial part of the book, Hass argues that in recent years, American leadership has been successful in selling the rhetoric that China is responsible for all US sufferings. This factor is also reflected in its foreign policy which has become increasingly hostile towards China. However, despite China's rapid rise, the US still maintains supremacy over the former in various domains and holds considerable influence throughout the world. In fact, after discussing US-China competition in the military, economic and technological domains, the author comes to the conclusion that Washington's actions to contain Beijing are harming its own

interests. Hass is of the opinion that the adversarial aspects of US-China dealings should not define the bilateral relationship. He is convinced that the US needs to explore new avenues where both countries should cooperate rather than compete with each other. He stresses that China will be better dealt with if efforts employed to manage or contain China are used by the US to strengthen itself from within. He recommends that foreign policy should be formulated while taking into account American strengths and Chinese weaknesses.

The book is an interesting read and looks at the US-China competition from a new angle. Rather than focusing on the traditional narrative that a rising China is a prime threat to nearly every US interest, it emphasises that the US is still strong and can be made even stronger by calculated and rational decision-making.

Its core strength is that it is an apt and objective articulation of where US foreign policy is going wrong and how the country's leadership should deal with another rising power. In fact, it is a very honest self-reflection that US needs to review its role of being the sole indispensable global power; that it needs to let China assume the role of another global power and confidently deal with it rather than making it an even bigger adversary by provocative actions. Hass makes it fairly easy to understand that being the two strongest players in global politics, US and China are bound by a strong interdependence. The nature of this interdependence can be competitive, but it must not become hostile. The interests of both powers will be better served if they chose to cooperate with each other on larger issues rather than focusing on weakening each other. The book helps to understand that cooperation is imperative to tackle global challenges in the form of climate change, global economy, and health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The author deliberates that this competitive interdependence can also help circumvent a major conflict between the two major powers.

*Stronger* is also an open critique on the concept of US being the global policeman since the end of the Cold War. According to Hass, the policy can no longer remain applicable with another rising power as it tends

to divert US attention towards areas of lesser importance. He emphasises that it is imperative for US leadership to devise a forward-looking foreign policy with regards to China and lays out various policy options while taking into account the new power blocs. While some might find Hass' style rather patronising, this reader felt that he offers a balanced approach that can enable his country's policymakers to understand that China's gains do not imply US' loss. It also warns that repercussions of US-China rivalry will be catastrophic for the world at large.

With the increasing discourse on the implications of US-China rivalry, the book is a timely contribution. It is concise yet comprehensive. It uses simple vocabulary and is free of unnecessary details. It is very well-structured and written in a very engaging manner. The book provides insightful and diverse viewpoints since the author has also mentioned approaches of other political scholars as well. However, an area where the book leaves the reader a bit confused is the lack of specific guidelines/recommendations as they are not backed by concrete steps as to how they can be implemented.

Overall, the book is an excellent take on the contours of great power competition and evolving world order. It is recommended to those who have an interest in the future of US-China relations. Reading Hass will also be helpful to those who want to understand the gradual transition which has taken place in China with regards to its military, politics, and economy. The work is equally important for his fellow Americans in order to have a broader, more objective view about a country ballyhooed as a major rival, and one, which has significant impact on their lives.