

BOOK-REVIEWS

*Has China Won?: The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy.* By KISHORE MAHUBANI.  
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In his new book, *Has China Won?: The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*, Kishore Mahubani provides a guide to understanding the state of the geopolitical relationship between China and the United States. In addition to the title question, *Has China Won?*, Mahubani also seeks to provoke readers with two others: *Has the United States lost?* and, in the event of a U.S.–China geopolitical clash, *Will humanity win?*

Mahubani considers how China was able to rise to its current position of near-global primacy and how both the Liberal International Order (LIO), and the US's time as its leader, are increasingly threatened. Consequently, Mahubani argues that the US–China clash is paradoxically both inevitable and avoidable, but it is ultimately up to both superpowers to employ measures in the coming decades to determine the outcome. Central to *Has China Won?* are Mahubani's efforts to explore the common ground between the two countries—through empirical, moral, and historical evaluation—and, ultimately, to encourage the Americans and Chinese to not view each other as existential threats but, rather, to see that they are indisputably the two most powerful countries in the world, and that they must work together to excel equally in the global order. Failure to successfully understand each other—or at the very least, to stabilize the Sino-American relationship—Mahubani ominously asserts, will result in far-reaching consequences that will impact the US, China, and their closest partners, and will threaten the very existence of humanity.

Mahubani explores the historical and contemporary origins of the biggest strategic mistakes that have contributed to the current tension-ridden state of Sino-American relations. For the US, Mahubani argues that the biggest strategic mistake lies in its inability to create a comprehensive political and economic strategy regarding China. For China, however, Mahubani argues that the biggest strategic mistake lies in its historical and contemporary determination to alienate the West. Drawing a broad historical timeline of events leading to this fatal mistake, Mahubani marshals compelling evidence to demonstrate that this critical error continues to threaten its trajectory towards usurping US global primacy. Drawing upon cases of the success of American businesses in China, including Boeing and General Motors, Mahubani challenges the long-held “Middle Kingdom” philosophical mind-set of numerous past and present Chinese businessmen. He shows that win-win partnerships have been, and can continue to be, achieved between the US and China. Drawing on diverse cases, Mahubani further challenges any potential hubris among Chinese leaders. He argues that it is only through opening itself to foreign investment, playing by the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other multilateral institutions, and re-attracting American business that China can achieve its goals of global economic hegemony and championing globalization.

A primary strength of *Has China Won?* is Mahubani's approach to disproving numerous misconceptions each country has about the other. A notable example is the American-held

belief that Xi Jinping-led China is increasingly aggressive, militaristic, and expansionist. In contrast to the portrayal by several Western media outlets and prominent American politicians, Mahhubani argues that it is the US, rather than China, that remains the biggest global militaristic threat, pointing to the colossal annual increases of US military defense spending as well as its large nuclear stockpiles in comparison with those of China. Perhaps Mahhubani's most striking argument against US claims is his analysis of China's militarization of the South China Sea. Drawing upon a first-hand account of the former US Ambassador to China, Stapleton Roy, Mahhubani counters the American narrative that Xi Jinping broke the 2015 agreement with former US President Barack Obama to refrain from militarizing the Spratlys in the South China Sea. Mahhubani argues that this narrative was primarily used to prove that China posed a militaristic threat to the US. However, according to Mahhubani and Roy, it is the US that broke its regional military promise through employing significant naval patrols in the area; Xi's militarization of the Spratlys was a response to this American breach. Mahhubani offers further examples, including the colossal annual increases of US military defense spending and the lingering "assumption of virtue" mentality throughout the American population, of the numerous hindrances to the US's long-term ability to partner and negotiate diplomatically with global powers, especially China.

Although Mahhubani acknowledges that he cannot discuss all 191 countries that could be impacted by a US–China clash, he calls for future research to address countries within the Global South in the collateral sphere of current US–China trade wars and the superpowers' increasingly inevitable geopolitical clash. But many notable countries that are increasingly dependent on trade with either the US or China—or, in numerous cases, both—are not mentioned. Specifically, the continued importance and growth of Sino-African bilateral trade agreements, including those with Nigeria and Angola, should be considered in the economic and political discourse surrounding both the future and potential fallout of the US–China contest. While recovery from a US–China geopolitical contest may be easier for North American and European countries, enduring colonial legacies and historical economic isolation makes countries of the Global South vulnerable to mistaken choices and high ensuing costs.

It is clear that Mahhubani's conclusions in *Has China Won?* concur with the assumptions of the political science community at large: US globalization, the LIO, and US global primacy are in peril. However, how does the COVID-19 pandemic challenge Mahhubani's predictions? While Mahhubani focuses largely on the hesitation of Chinese businessmen to open up to the US and other foreign investment, the four years of "America First" policies, trade war antagonisms, and hubristic sanctions have certainly damaged the still-fragile economic superpower coupling. Moreover, it is clear that Trump's relentless and racially charged sentiments towards China throughout the pandemic—disturbingly echoing colonial-era "Yellow Peril" discourse—has dangerously provoked Sinophobia among the US population. The Biden administration will face perhaps the most daunting and fragile period of Sino-American relations, and in order to improve these relations and remedy the damage caused by the Trump administration, the administration must overcome numerous domestic, bipartisan, and international hurdles. Ultimately, in an age of immense economic tension and political uncertainty, *Has China Won?* is a provocative, confronting, and challenging work that allows readers to understand the mistakes of the US and China, as well as the opportunities that remain for both countries not only to shape the future, but to succeed in it together.