International Relations · GS - II

“The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of a China, that is much more challenging than the erstwhile Soviet Union.” Explain.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2021	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

US–China strategic rivalry, economic interdependence, technological competition, military modernisation, Indo-Pacific, Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, Belt and Road Initiative, global institutions, ideological competition, nuclear deterrence.

Model Answer

Introduction

China's rise has challenged American predominance across economic, technological and strategic domains. Unlike the Soviet Union, China is deeply integrated into the global economy, making the competition multidimensional.

Why China Presents a Distinct Challenge

- **Economic strength:** China is a major manufacturing and trading power, creating extensive economic interdependence with the United States.
- **Technological rivalry:** Competition over semiconductors, artificial intelligence, telecommunications and critical minerals affects future economic and military advantages.
- **Military modernisation:** China's expanding naval capabilities and missile systems challenge US strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Regional flashpoints:** Taiwan and disputes in the South China Sea increase the risk of military confrontation.

- **Global influence:** China's Belt and Road Initiative and engagement with international institutions expand its diplomatic and economic reach.
- **Systemic competition:** Differences over political governance, human rights and international norms intensify strategic distrust.

Comparison with the Soviet Union

The Soviet Union posed a formidable military and ideological challenge but had less integration with global trade networks. China's economic centrality makes containment more costly and complex. However, China also faces demographic, economic and geopolitical constraints.

Conclusion

China represents a major long-term challenge to US leadership, but describing it as an existential threat may overstate the case. Strategic competition requires deterrence, selective cooperation and resilient international partnerships.

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