

New Sino-US Rivalry in the Center of Asia Pacific

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Abstract

Sino-US rivalry has grabbed the attention of world because of its uniqueness in nature. While studying this subject it can be true said that “everything is going to be changed, but the change cannot be changed”. This is one of the prominent phenomena of 21st century as it transformed the center of world economy from West to East. After a long dominating spell of West on economic resources of the world, now China has emerged as a potential competitor. In previous century the US actually has been dominating the economic deals around the globe, as she is still the highest dominant economic and military power, while China is now directly posing challenge to the world status quo. This new shift brought rhetorical waves in the dominant western society that followed by new techniques of warfare against the emerging one. In this research paper it has described the new Sino-US rivalry in Asia-Pacific, which is gaining momentum day-by-day. Owing to the current tension between China and US, thus the researchers desired to understand their readers about the ongoing warfare between emerging China and the United States particularly in Asia-Pacific by fixing eyes on the regional bottlenecks, which face by the emerging China in her ancestral region.

Keywords: Asia-Pacific, Sino-US Rivalry, Warfare, Emerging China, South China Sea.

Introduction

Asia is the most populous, vibrant, dynamic and parsimoniously conducive continent in the world (Yu, 2017).¹ The continent divided into different regions such as Northern Asia, Central Asia, Southern Asia, Southeastern Asia, Eastern Asia and Western Asia having similar

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features. Asia Pacific is one of the core regions of Pacific Ocean in Asian continent that became center of the problems at the beginning of 21st Century (Milhiet, 2017). The region is the home of three major economies of the world i.e. America, Japan and China.

Asia Pacific currently keeps much importance for the US interest unlike before the financial crisis in 2008 that crashed the Asian economic market and the US remained passive to play the role as a panacea to safeguarded Asian market vis-à-vis Chinese came forward and played their due role and provided bailout packages which had rescued the Asian economies from the collapsed. Due to this step, Beijing prevails of new stage to play as a regional leader and would become the sole panacea to satiate any problems of the regional states. Similarly, the United States realized and felt that it may be the arrival of newcomer i.e. 'China'. In this 21st Century the region has grabbed the world attention due to its strategic, economic and political importance in the world arena. The concept of Asia-Pacific got momentum during 1960s and 1970s, and thus South China Sea considered strategically important in the international politics (Sana, 2012).² As Hillary Clinton mentioned in November 2011, that Asia Pacific is an important driver of the global politics (Ibid). The second most serious threat about which many scholars predicted would be between and among its regional states in general and particularly between China and America, owing to their conflict over its strategic and rich resourceful islands of the South China Sea (SCS), where most of the regional and extra-regional states have fixed their eyes on SCS and want to establish their maritime basis in this region. The region covers 22 per cent land of the world. South China Sea (SCS) is also posing threats to the Chinese epic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as Chinese government demarcated by her 9-lines (Casarini, 2018).

The arrival of 21st century brought sinister for the region, which it has been considered the bone of contention between USA and China; the two big powers of the world at the brink of war. Both states are having bundle of issues and disagreements in some of their strategies; inter alia they have negative perceptions and aggressive designs over some of their policies as well. In this particular region one of the main concerns for many analysts and scholars is that, which both actors claimed and showed their possession on SCS. The equivocal ambitions over the region of both big powers push them into war, as some of the scholars called it Sino-US rivalry in Asia-Pacific, which is creating a very tense environment in the region not only for both parties but also for other regional states. The second and foremost issue between US and China is the current wave of economic warfare after Donald Trump came

into power and is likely both states are going into war. As former US President Barak Obama, once stated that they have lost economic war from China, it clearly indicates that US has shown grave concerns to maintain its influence either to pursue her old status quo of hard power or through soft policy.

Since Second World War US has been maintaining its strong hold over the regional politics of Asia. China pessimistically perceived US ambitions in this region and considers that it will limit China's dream of regional hegemon therefore, Beijing is developing strong economic relations with its regional states, which ultimately creating concerns and affecting the monopoly of global powers (Bijian, 2005).³ Simply, we can conclude that "world order" has been shifted to the "New World Order". This transition is not happening like the old status quo process when hegemony and imperialism were the main objective of the world power; the 21st century international politics of the world has totally changed.

The old saga of hegemony and imperialism replaced by cooperation and organized growth (Sultan, 2016). Recently the report of new National Defense Strategy the Pentagon disclosed on January 19, 2018, that our primary focus of national security are China and Russia (in terms of economy) - not terrorism (Ebrahim, 2018). According to the mentioned report Washington observed that Beijing is advancing her military influence on regional states in order to modify the Indo-Pacific region in their own interest and thus the US "uni-polar moment" would inevitably end (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 23).⁴ Chinese President Xi Jinping announced Chinese dream in 2013 with aim to rejuvenate of the people of China, while the same slogan also adopted by the US President Trump during its presidential campaign "Make America Great Again", it was not just a slogan but it is a strategy to overcome economic, political and cultural crisis. According to Ikenberry "if the struggle of power starts between China and US, China will have advantage on US.(Ibid).

Background of Study

The world is in a transition like it happened during the rise of nation-state or industrial revolution and then globalization, which brought changes and affecting the daily life of an individual (Kegly & Blenton, 2011). The 21st Century brought a new means of business; it has repeated the history where the means of business were maritime lands. Today most of the states tilted towards maritime business and mostly business doing through sea routes. In this respect, one of the strategic and spectacular seas in Asia Pacific is South China Sea (SCS). Asia Pacific is generally refers to the combination of East Asia, Southeast Asia and its

four Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Due to its fertility and strategically significance nature always attracts the regional actors where they show claim on the islands of the region legally or illegally, while some of the external factors are taking interest as well. So these claims escalate intolerance among them.

Importance of South China Sea

South China Sea is one of the less discovered (by perspective of natural resources) seas in the world so far. Due to its enormous natural resources leads to attract global actors particularly the regional one (Truong & Knio, 2016, p. 1).⁵ Because of its unique geographical location most of the trade coming from Middle East and African region to Southeast Asian and East Asian states mostly pass through this route. Some of the analysts argued that South China Sea was a peaceful sea in ancient time but due to its enormous mineral resources that discovered in 1970s, it became one of the disputed seas in contemporary arena.

Unlike Middle East SCS wouldn't become imbroglia conundrum. As Truong and Knio (2016) mentioned that: "Though hydrocarbons and liquid natural gas (LNG) discovered since the 1970s have the contributed factor to economic growth in East and Southeast Asia, maritime tension can put a block on such development".

The second foremost concern is the hostilities of several states in the region over on some islands. As some of the states involved in the dispute with each other are: China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Actual status of occupation reported by "Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative", in the SCS there are five claimant states who occupied many islands, rocks and reefs except Brunei. China and Vietnam occupied most of the Islands, rocks and reefs in the region followed by Philippines, while Malaysia only occupied a few. China occupied the Paracel islands and Patras Islands. Wherein, Taiwan and other five states stuck with the Spratly Islands. The Spratly Islands could be the cause of war among the claimant states.

Security and Economic Challenges

In 2009, Beijing has seen some of the anguish scene in its immediate periphery when Beijing adopted more assertive, belligerent and demanding tone and posture. Following the issue of ASEAN, when it has been collapsed due to the dispute over on South China Sea, where most of Southeast Asian states have claimed possession over its islands while in other side Beijing has been considered and stuck with her hereditary claim on it i.e. 9-line, which directly threatens to the sovereignty of

regional states and the violation of UNCLOS. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) III [United Nations Conference on the Law of Sea] – (1973-82) – clearly distributed territorial waters among nations. China's currently aggressive claim on some of the islands has been earned a very bad posture in the region, its assertive behavior in maritime land disputes leads to chaos in the region (Pu, 2018).⁶ There are some critics of Chinese development in the East and South China Seas along with Indian Ocean. Sometimes its extraordinary strength creates anxiety for peripheries' states specifically Japan, India and Taiwan, albeit it is the sole concerns of all the regional states. One of the cogent causes of its jingoistic attitude is the threat to Japan over on the Senkaku Islands (known as the Diayu Islands in China) (Bader, 2018).⁷

Sino-Japanese Issues

Since 1894 China and Japan fought three causative¹ wars in the region (Mizokami, 2015).⁸ The real issue happened in that time when Japan on the move forward its rapid and impressive high tech advancement in the late 19th century, where she won war not just from Qing dynasty in 1895, but also against the Russians in 1905, were preliminary to an extreme nationalism that surrounded the entire region during WWII. In September 2010 dust-up between Chinese and Japanese navy over a fishing boat when it arrived in disputed water (Shambaugh, 2011).⁹

Tokyo supports Taiwan's independence and ensured diplomatic relations with each other. Japanese political pundits even stated that Tokyo would assist US forces if the military warfare occurs in the region. Tokyo seeks that if China taking control of Taiwan then it will create great geo-political threats and blockade the sea lanes which surrounding Taiwan because it is very important for Japan oil shipment or this move might be attempted to take control of the islands 'Diaoyu' (Senkaku in Japan) (Wang, 2000, P. 361, cited by, Chen 2008).¹⁰ Sinkaku islands are one of the main concerns of both the states since 1885, when Tokyo conducted one of its surveys through the agencies of Okinawa Prefecture and other way. As per survey there was no trace found which showed Beijing claim because the island had been uninhabited since long.

It is clear as crystal that whenever any state or China wrongly claims over on Senkaku Islands or show belligerent attitude towards Japan; US and Japan forces would be ready for the outset (Mizokami,

1 Causative means – an effective cause and producing an outcome.
The Dialogue

2015).¹¹ The already established US bases such as Kadena, Yokota, Misawa and Sasebo will use the American forces without the permission of Tokyo under the treaty of 'Mutual Cooperation and Security' against any regional states.

The Pugnacious Attitude of North Korea

North Korean nuclear capabilities brought other states to the nuclear race in the region particularly Japan and South Korea. Many scholars argued that Beijing and Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal may one-day provoke Tokyo and Seoul to become nuclear states for defense purpose. Kissinger particularly described and warned that the Pyongyang nuclear desire that it has almost kick off its nuclear weapons, which would gradually spread in the whole Asia and further he commented that belligerent attitude of Pyongyang brings alarming news of nuclear threats, and ultimately put Tokyo and Seoul on the same edge, which resulted "East Asia is being the hub of nuclear proliferation".

The Pyongyang nuclear threats have already prompted Tokyo and Seoul which they have introduced ballistic-missile defense system, which it has great displeasure for China while it also is unlikely and unfavorable for the United States. As the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's try to modify its pacifist constitution to make amend for re-militarize again and can able to stand in the same row where North Korea standing in the current arena (Ballesteros, 2017). The United States new administration meticulously deal the nuclear proliferation of Pyongyang causing discomfort which may probably triggering an arm race, ultimately lead to when the regime would collapse in North Korea in near future, which Beijing calculated disadvantages alike the bulge of refugees enter into northern area of China (Plant & Rhode, 2013).¹² Once Victor Cha, former director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council has argued that China and North Korea are 'fixed in a mutual hostage connection' as the 'North Korea needs Chinese help for their survival, and the Chinese need the North Korea not to collapse' (Ibid). Tokyo and Seoul are the sole state who vying to get 'the bomb'. The Time report showed that other regional states such as Taiwan, Myanmar, Australia and Vietnam are as whole deliberately arming towards a rogue state of North Korea in the region.



Source: Jahangir World Times, *Issue* (Sep, 2018)

The US massive military presence-dilemma for china

There was no role for the US to deploy her military might in Asia-Pacific before, but the legacy of her deployment in the region started when the Cold War erupted so the US statecraft deployed her forces for the sake of to contain erstwhile former USSR and communism. Another legacy of the existing US forces was the Korean War, which brought US arsenals to the region.

The US Troops on Korean Peninsula

The tension between Pyongyang and Seoul always remains high. Both the states have technically on the brink of war. The formal peace treaty was never ratified unanimously due to their mutual hostility and antagonistic relationship. The belligerent attitude of Pyongyang where it poses direct threats and deployed her forces against Seoul always criticized by the international community particularly the Washington. Currently, Pentagon has deployed 28,500 troops in South Korea having sophisticated navy arsenal as well, while 19,000 soldiers specifically deployed from the 8th Army at 'Yongsan' Seoul territory just 25 miles away from the Pyongyang peninsula creating tension between Pyongyang and Washington (France-Presse, 2017).¹³ Adding to the previous development Pentagon and Seoul routinely conducted military drills. Recently the United States installed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) at Seoul for the purpose to intercept middle range missile in the region (Ibid).

The US Troops in Japan and Guam

Pentagon has deployed massive troops in Japan since the end of WWII. Almost 50,000 military personnel have been organized and maintained on the soil of Japan. Similarly, the US has also stationed her 5000,

permanent navy corps deployed at Guam, a small island of the United States in the region. ATHAAD battery exists at Guam islands (France-Press, 2017).

Sino-US economic warfare

There are many types of war but the trade warfare is very unique and ubiquitous phenomenon because the weapons of this war are found everywhere. It may be food items, kids' toys, steel, construction materials, medical equipment and electronic devices. If the countries getting revenge of trade war then they imposed huge tariff, trade embargo, minimize imports and maximize their exports, applying the policy of mercantilism and protectionism and gradually going into unfair trade practices. The growing trade conflict between US and China seems threat to the world peace and development because the momentum of unfair trade war between US and China increasing more and falling into 'The Thucydides' or 'Churchill trap' which ultimately could lead to major catastrophe due to the engagement of two economic giants in the world stage.

Thucydides or Churchill trap

China's economic boom being threatens the status quo power in the world stage, it creates complex understanding of each other actions, reaction and intentions, which it seems to be led them in a deadly trap, which Graham Allison once called 'Thucydides or Churchill Trap'. Allison metaphorically linked it with the name of Greek historian Thucydides. Thucydides has written a great historical book "The history of Peloponnesian War" before 500 years ago. In this book Thucydides wrote the details history of war between Athens and Sparta in the Greek (Allison, 2017).¹⁴

So the said political drama attracts the attention of the whole world where Donald Trump and Xi Jinping are playing the character of supermen. The 'Thucydides trap' would engulf both the states into direct all-out war, while the 'Churchill trap' would be the prolonged and persistent warfare between US and China, where most of their allies also play vital role. Presence of the modern technologies and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) no one can agree to fell into all-out war the first trap. By contrast to the 'Thucydides trap' the 'Churchill trap' presents genuine risks of the continue warfare between the United States and China.

Sino-US Trade War and Pakistan

There are many debates, scholar articles, on Sino-US trade war. The conflict between two economic giants aims to the global dominancy. According to the report of Wall Street Journal ‘the conflict growing in Pakistan’. In hitherto, Islamabad was in the camp of the west, as the world seen recent transformation in its foreign policy from west to east for the sake of its economic and security interests. Before seven decades ago Pakistan was one of the strategic ally and all weather friend of the United States. Due to this dramatic change Pakistan positioning like apple of discard between this hostility. Similarly, Pakistan national financial security has been hanging in the balance (Wall Street Journal, 2018).¹⁵

United States Concerns About China’s Influence

Since 2013, after the announcement of ‘BRI’ by (China) and ‘Asia Pivot Policy’ by (US), the war of words, hostility and chaos burgeoning between Sino-US. As the rapid speeds of Chinese economic ascendancy through inter-connectivity cobweb affecting the old status quo power of the US in the world particularly in Asia-Pacific is one of the main cause of the United States concerns. Many analysts argued that China is the only emerging power that can easily topple the United States hegemony in the world. As mentioning the following expert’s statements:

“The most important factor is the decline of US power. While the United States remains the most powerful state today, its decline has been much faster than many have expected. The United States has been strong in all aspects since World War II, but now it remains strong only in the military force.”

Conclusion

Some strategists said that Sino-US competition look like the tug of war between two economic giant of the world, similarly, the pugnacious scenario of both the states, which ultimately leads to war (Pu, 2018). This competition would be exacerbated the region soon (Shambaugh, 2011). While the Chinese president Xi Jinping personally declaring that ‘we must all cooperate to avoid the “Thucydides Trap” (Yuan, 2018). As Xi one of the gigantic regional integration initiative “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” which would bring cooperation, harmony, and regional integration and interdependency between and among the states. It will diminish the concept of comparative utility of war, which it has been using as a tool for seizing profits of other state.

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