

Great Power Politics: A Sino-American Relations in the 21st Century

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Abstract: China's rise, its form, and implications have been a topical issue among international relations experts long before Xi Jinping assumed office as the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of China and President of the People's Republic of China (the world's most populous nation). Nevertheless, since 2012 (when President Xi took over the mantle of leadership of the country), questions of whether or not China is a threat to the existing international order, a revisionist state or a regional hegemon, have increased. Compared to his predecessors, Xi is said to be a more assertive and an ambitious leader. He presides over an economically viable and militarily powerful nation. The fact that China's influence is increasing in global and regional affairs having survived the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, sends shivers down the spine of its neighbors as they seem oblivious to her motives. In a unipolar political system largely controlled by the USA (the hegemon), China's rapid economic growth and growing influence around the world especially in East Asia seems to be worrisome because like the Power Transition theory states that a new power is likely to question the legitimacy of the hegemon. However, China has maintained that its rise will be peaceful because it is neither a revisionist to an expansionist power. Since after the cold-war, relations between the two great powers have taken different turns. The two countries have had moments of confrontation, cooperation and competition in the 21st century. This article seeks to examine events like the South China Sea Disputes, Taiwan Issue, the Korean peninsula and Southeast Asia has shaped and will shape Sino-American relations now and in the future.

Keywords: Great Power Politics, USA, China, Cooperation, Confrontation, Competition

I. INTRODUCTION

The current international political system is uni-polar and the USA is the hegemon. Of course, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, its military capabilities, technological Know-how and economic index became superior to no other. However, there are a few States whose rise and rapid development may be perceived as a potential threat to the hegemony. One of such States is the post-cold-war China. There seem to be some concerns as to the nature of Sino-American relations. Some scholars and diplomats posit that while this relationship was confrontational between 1949 and 1971, it was characterized by a Quasi-Cooperation from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. However, by the end of the cold war, the relationship turned towards cooperation,

especially since China stood with the USA to fight the USSR (their common enemy at the time).

China poses a major challenge to the United States and indeed the rest of the world by virtue of its status as a new global economic superpower. The world is afraid because such rising powers can disturb the exiting international order and trigger security as well as economic conflicts, just like the cases of Germany, the USA and the European Union in the late 19th and 20th century respectively. (Bergsten C. et'al, 2008)

Irrespective of their individual biases, most scholars of International Relations agree that the three words 'Confrontation' 'Competition' and 'Cooperation' have characterized the Sino-American relationship at one point or another. Students of Politics all over the world can attest to the dynamic nature of Sino-American relations. In the 21st century, especially during and after the George W. Bush Presidency, China –America relations has undergone a dramatic transformation. Washington and Beijing have either had to agree, disagree or cooperate in issues such as the South China Sea, Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), Taiwan issue, Syrian Crisis, North Korean nuclear crisis and others. (Glazer, 2003). From that time till, now, the two giants have worked together, competed against each other and disagreed on sundry issues.

According to President Xi Jinping's book 'The Governance of China', China's foreign policy revolves around peaceful development, cooperation with developing countries, Neighbourhood diplomacy, Multilateral relations, and a New model of major-country relations. The new model of major-country relations also known as Great Power Politics relates to major powers like the United States, Russia and other countries in Europe. It encapsulates President Xi's efforts to recast and reemphasize China's long-standing stress on the need for cooperative, "win-win" relations among the major powers (and especially with the United States) in an arguably new manner. In particular, he stresses the need and opportunity for the major powers (and indeed at times he says for "all" powers) to develop cooperation and mutual benefit through the creation of a "new model of major-country relations."

This paper seeks to examine these issues and events surrounding Sino-American relations in this century.

International Relations Theory and Great Power Politics

This Study on Sino-American relations in the 21st Century , attempts to examine this dynamic and multi-faceted relationship through the Neoliberal and Neorealist theories of International Relations. Neorealism and Neoliberalism are the key theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, especially with regards to Sino-American relations and China's Rise. The core assumptions of the two theories are questions about the main actors are in international relations, the characteristics of the nature of the international system and what constitutes a state's 'national interest'. (Masteron, 2014)

Realism believes that states are the main actors in the international arena and that Politics among nations is governed by interest, defined in terms of power (Military might Population, Natural Resources). For realists, States use institutions to pursue their interests and bypass them once these interests are no longer reflected in the institution. Thus, It is pursuit of national interest that leads to either conflict, competition or cooperation in international relations (Morgenthau, 1985). Liberalism on the other hand opines that States are the major actors in the international arena however; they also believe that institutions and governmental organizations matter as well.

Realism (Offensive or defensive) is a veritable framework for understanding Sino-American relations because it presupposes that this relationship has been characterized by the pursuit of national interest. In areas of mutual interest, both countries have cooperated and are still cooperated. However, at other times there have been concerns that one party seems to be either benefiting at the expense of the other or undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other.

Neo-liberalism is a major theory of international relations and a relevant tool in examining China's foreign policy. Neoliberals are of the opinion that States are the major actors in the international arena however, they also believe that institutions and governmental organizations matter as well. Although Neoliberal scholars agree that the world is anarchic, they affirm that its effect on inter-state behaviour can be mitigated (Masteron, 2014). For example, While the Chinese Government headed by the Communist Party Of China is the major actor in China's foreign policy formulation and implementation, Institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Central Military Commission in China among others, affect China's Foreign Policy.

Institutional Liberalism (a branch of neoliberalism) is based on the tenet that international organizations and regimes can help mitigate the effects of anarchy in the international system thereby discouraging what Hobbes calls a constant struggle of "every man against every man" because of the uncertainty of the actions of other states and the absence of a "night watchman" to come to their aid. (Mearsheimer, 2001). Institutional liberals call for stronger institutions because these

institutions are capable of changing state interests and identity , "creating a common identity among the actors".

Economic Liberalism (Interdependence theory) is another branch of Neoliberalism. According to this theory, economic interactions between states reduce conflict by increasing the cost of war. Such economic interactions can come in form of foreign Direct investments, portfolio investments, etc. (Polachek, 1980). This theory is relevant in explaining China's relations with its trading partners because of its 'friendly neighbourhood policy'. China's interdependent economic interactions with its southeast Asian Neighbours give credence to this theory (Vinod et al, 2008). This also seems to be the solution to a mutually beneficial (win-win) Sino-American Cooperation. From the above, we see that both realism and Liberalism are veritable tools in analysis the dynamic and robust Sino-American relationship in the 21st Century.

Sino-American Confrontation

Sino-American relations have not always been rosy. For example, in 1882, the U.S. passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, (which restricted Chinese immigrants from obtaining US Citizenship on account of their race). The Boxer Rebellion, Barack Obama's Asia Pivot strategy, The US support for Japan in the Senkaku Island dispute, The Korean Peninsula War (1949), US war in Vietnam, U.S involvement in Taiwan, Xingjiang and Tibet issues, NATO's bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 during the war in the Balkans, etc. have caused a strain in the relationship in the past (Dean, 2012). These and more have characterized Sino-American relations in the past. Is it possible for China and the USA to engage in Warfare? Is a Sino-American conflict imminent?

It is easy for International Relations theorists, especially of the liberal extension to argue that the possibility of a conflict between the two great powers is unlikely because of three factors: the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons, the pacifying effect of economic interdependence and the hope that China will not want to challenge the statuesque of the current world order but would rather subordinate itself to the institutions, rules and norms of the current world order. However, some events such as the 1999 Kargil Conflict between India and Pakistan (both nuclear powers), China's involvement in AIIB, BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have made these arguments less attractive (Layne, 2015).

In his article "Avoiding a Sino-American Confrontation" Christopher Layne debunks the arguments of American Liberal Scholars and policy maker who are of the opinion that the great power war (which characterized the Cold-war era) is an obsolete phenomenon on the basis that China's rapid rise is an indication that the war is far from being over. According to him, Great powers compete hard for power, security, status, prestige, and influence. "Newly emerging great powers want to move up the league table to the top of the great power premier league. If they succeed, they want to leverage their new found power to remake the existing international order

into a new one that privileges their interests. They also want to become dominant - hegemonic - in their own region.” (Layne,2015)

Due to the divergent national interest of countries, especially great powers, conflict in international relations is inevitable. Thus, Sino-American relations have been a theatre of conflicts in certain key areas. One of such is the South-China Sea dispute.

South China Sea

South China Sea is a marginal sea that is by the Pacific Ocean, between Kalimantan and the Malacca Straits and extends to the Strait of Republic of China (Taiwan). As the name suggests, it is in the south of China, but China is not the only country or entity laying claims to the Sea. The Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, are also claiming a spot or two on the Sea. The International Hydrographic Organization in its 1953 report claims that the sea is located in the South of China, the east of Vietnam, the Malay peninsula and Sumatra up to the Singaporean Strait, west of the Philippines and north of the Bangka Belitung Island.¹

Each of the countries mentioned above has one claim over the area or another. Some have even gone ahead to name the disputed region their way. For example, in 2011, the Government of the Philippines started referring to the Spratly Islands as “West Philippine Sea” or simply “The Philippine Sea”². In 2012, President Benigno Aquino III through an Administrative order directed that the part of the South China Sea bordering its exclusive economic zone be referred to as the “West Philippine Sea.”³ Indonesia recently renamed the part of the sea along its exclusive economic zone as the “North Natuna Sea.”

Strategic Importance of the sea

The sea is not only vital to the survival of the countries concerned; it is also strategically important as well. Apart from the fact that the sea is the link between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Southeast Asian countries depend on the sea for fish consumption and exports. One-third of the world’s shipping, worth over \$3 trillion (trade volume) passes through that sea every year especially through the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits (3).⁴ Also, beneath the seabed, is a huge reserve of oil and gas⁵. A 2013 report by the United

States’ Energy Information Administration estimated at the area has over 11 billion barrels of oil and about 7,500 km³ of gas reserves. Many countries especially China and Japan import goods from Africa and the Middle east through this same sea (24).⁶

Country	% Share of World GDP	Trade Value through South China Sea (USD billions)	South China Sea Trade As % of All Trade in Goods
United States	24.5	208	5.72
China	14.8	1470	39.5
Japan	6.53	240	19.1
Germany	4.58	215	9.00
United Kingdom	3.46	124	11.8
France	3.26	83.5	7.77
India	2.99	189	30.6
Italy	2.45	70.5	8.14
Brazil	2.37	77.3	23.4
Canada	2.02	21.8	2.67

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The Table above shows that China relies on the South China Sea for its trade is unprecedented. As at 2016, China exports through the SCS (South-China Sea) was over \$874 Billion Dollars, while Its imports through the Sea was well over \$598 Billion. Thus, China was the highest importer and exporter of products through the SCS in 2016⁷

U.S Involvement in the Dispute:

Glaser (2012) believes that “The risk of conflict in the South China Sea is significant. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines have competed for territorial and jurisdictional claims, particularly over rights to exploit the region’s possibly extensive reserves of oil and gas.”

Although the region is nowhere near the geographical area, nor is it within its jurisdiction, the United States is increasingly playing an assertive role in the region under the notion of ‘Freedom of Navigation.’ Of course, the reason for this can be summarized under “national interest” which in this case is mainly economic. “Each year, \$5.3 trillion of trade passes through the South China Sea; U.S. trade accounts for \$1.2 trillion of this total.” (Glaser, 2012)

Glaser further explains that the US interest and involvement in the region is manifold. Periodically, U.S military vessels operate within the area even into China’s exclusive economic Zone. This brings to question whether or not the USA has the right to patrol the area.

¹ International Hydrographic Organization (1953) “Limited of Oceans and seas”. 3rd edition <https://epic.awi.de/29772/1/IHO1953a.pdf>

² Quismundo, T (June 13,2011), “South China Sea renamed in the Philippines” Philippines Daily Inquirer. Retrieved from <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Asia/Story/A1Story20110613-283772.html>

³ International Business Times (September 14, 2012) “West Philippines Sea Limited to Exclusive Economic Zone”, Retrieved from <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/west-philippines-sea-limited-exclusive-economic-zone-120023464.html>

⁴ China Power, August 4, 2017 “How much Trade transits the South China Sea?” Retrieved on November 24th 2017, from <https://chinapower.csis.org/much.trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

⁵ McDowell R. (2011) A Look at the top Issues at Asian Security Meeting . Associated Press. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/feedarticle/9755825>

⁶ Johnson, Keith (5 May 2014). "How Do You Say 'Drill Baby, Drill' in Chinese?". www.foreignpolicy.com. AFP - Getty. Retrieved 6 November 2017.

⁷ China Power, August 4, 2017 “How much Trade transits the South China Sea?” Retrieved on November 24th 2017, from <https://chinapower.csis.org/much.trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

According to the USA, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) says nothing about seeking approval from the coastal states before any nation can conduct military operations within the EEZ⁸. China does not share this view. It insists that "reconnaissance activities undertaken without prior notification and permission of the coastal state violate Chinese domestic law and international law." (Glaser, 2012)

Thus on its part, China has beefed up its military presence in the area as well. With modern maritime paramilitary forces and naval capabilities, it seeks to enforce her sovereignty and territorial integrity even within the disputed region. With the large growth of her submarines, China seems to be ready for an attack by any country, including the United States. In the past, she has intercepted U.S reconnaissance planes in the EEZ in 2001 and 2009. This caused a strain in the Sino-American relations.

Another reason why the USA feels it had a legal right to intervene in the disputes is that of its allies, especially Vietnam and the Philippines. Glaser affirms that the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the USA and the Philippines which states that "the United States could be drawn into a China-Philippines conflict because of its 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines. The treaty states, "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes." may force the USA to confront China in the event of an armed attack (Glaser, 2012).

South China Sea Disputes: An imminent World War 3?

For Polina Tikhonova (2015), the South China Sea dispute is between China and Russia on one side and the USA and her allies on the other side. According to her, the stakes are high. Thus no country is taking chances. "The area has been long recognized as sea-lanes under international law. However, since the islands have runways for military flights as well as huge potential for large-scale construction of military bases and airstrips, Beijing is not so eager to let them go. There have been reports about China's heavy weapons being deployed to the area, which worries not only the US but also the Asian neighbors."⁹

Classical Realists like Hans Morgenthau (1974) believe that what drives state behaviour is a function of human nature. He argued that man's innate lust for power is the root of international conflict. In what he called "the *amino dominandi*, the desire for power", Morgenthau sees power as an end and not a means and therefore equates a state's political success on its ability to maintain, increase or demonstrate its power over others. For neorealists, the

anarchy in the international system drives states to increase power relations with others. Thus, power is not an end, but a means ; a means to security of states (the ultimate goal). based on this, can we assume that the power tussle between China , USA and their allies in the South China Sea is as a result of the centrality of the disputed area to the survival of the states concerned?.

The USA and her allies (Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea) have a strong military presence with warships and warplanes within the region, ready for action. In fact, the US naval aircraft have made some fly-through missions over the islands in an attempt to stop China from exercising Sovereignty over the region. On the other hand, China has exerted a lot of influence within the area. For example, she is always ready to intercept the US naval aircraft whenever they attempt to fly-over its territory. Beijing's increased military presence and operational capacity in the south china sea through the construction of artificial islands and the establishment of air defence identification zones (ADI) over Diaoyu/Diaoyutai could trigger a USA response which could spark off major confrontation in the disputed areas.(Esteban, 2017).

There is a 50-50 chance of the South China Sea dispute resulting in a full-blown war which will strain the relationship between US and China.

II. TAIWAN SECESSIONIST ISSUE

Everyone who understands International Geo-Politics and the theory of National Interest knows that the Taiwan issue is a big problem in the Sino-American relations. China has always maintained that for there to be a cordial relation among the two countries, mutual respect for each other's key interest is vital. One of such key interests is the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country.

Although China has participated in more territorial disputes than any other state since the end of World War II (23), it has settled the majority of these conflicts through bilateral agreements, usually by compromising over the sovereignty of contested land. China has used force in some of these disputes, but it has generally not seized or conquered large amounts of land that it did not control before the outbreak of hostilities. (Fravel 2010).

During the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, held on the 18th-24th of October 2017, the General Secretary of the Party and President of China was quoted saying that

"Resolving the Taiwan question to realize China's complete reunification is the shared aspiration of all Chinese people and is in the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation. We must uphold the principles of "peaceful reunification" and "one country, two systems", work for the peaceful

⁸ Exclusive Economic Zone

⁹ Tikhonova, Polina (2015), "South China Sea Debate Could Lead to World War 3" retrieved on 21st November, 2017.

<http://www.valuewalk.com/2015/06/south-china-sea-world-war-3/>

*development of cross-strait relations and advance the process toward the peaceful reunification of China"*¹⁰

The President further reiterated China's firm stand in safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. According to him, the historical tragedy of national division will never repeat itself because any separatist activity for Taiwan's independence in any form is certain to meet with the resolute opposition of the Chinese people.¹¹

2.1 Why Taiwan?

Scholars like Fred Bergsten and Charles Freeman have wondered why the United States cares so much about the Island (Taiwan) and it is committed to it even though it is aware that such commitment could lead to confrontation with the world's most important rising power, China (a country with nuclear capabilities)? They also wondered why China cares so much about the island that she doesn't mind jeopardizing many other political and economic interests to concentrate on gaining control over the territory? (Bergsten C. et'al, 2008:170)

Could China's interest in reunifying the Island to the mainland be because Taiwan "...is the final piece in China's attempt to overcome the legacy of its 'Century of humiliation' spanning the 19th and early 20th centuries..." when it was occupied by outside powers such as Japan who occupied Taiwan in 1895? Could China's interest in Taiwan also be connected with realization of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation? Some Chinese Strategists have written about the importance for China's security of gaining control out to the "first island chain": They view Taiwan as part of a band of territory around China's eastern maritime periphery that includes US allies Japan, Korea, and the Philippines and thus is of strategic concern. Also of significance are the benefits to China's economy from increasing cross-strait trade and investment flows. (Bergsten C. et'al, 2008:171)

The US support for Taiwan, a Chinese province that broke off China after the Communist party came to power in 1949 is an issue that will not only strain the relationship but is capable of leading to a direct confrontation and possibly war. Even though the USA affirms that the disputed province is a part of China, she still continues to maintain military, cultural and social relations with her. It seems that the USA involvement with Taiwan is no unconnected with the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.

Of course like Sino-American relations, the answers to questions are complex and broad. However what seems to be clear is that China is likely to resist any attempt at undermining her sovereignty and territorial integrity. This means that China may react to protect its integrity if the USA continues to meddle in its internal affairs. Xi Jinping reiterated China's stance on resisting any form of external

influence over any part of its territory. *"We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party at any time or any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China"*.

While Iskander Rehman (2014) believes that *"...abandoning Taiwan would likely fail to improve the Sino-U.S. relationship. Second, the abandonment of Taiwan might considerably enhance China's geostrategic position in Asia and endanger that of the United States and its allies. Last but not least, forsaking the small island democracy would severely erode American credibility in the Indo-Pacific, add fuel to an ongoing regional arms race, and encourage nuclear proliferation"*

Charles Glaser affirms that "U.S. attempt to preserve its ability to defend Taiwan, meanwhile, could fuel a conventional and nuclear arms race... and leading to a general poisoning of U.S.-Chinese relations." He candidly advises the United States to *"...consider backing away from its commitment to Taiwan. This would remove the most obvious and contentious flashpoint between the United States and China and smooth the way for better relations between them in the decades to come."*¹²

Thus, the United States' continued support for Taiwan's independence may lead to a Sino-American conflict and even a confrontation.

III. SINO-AMERICAN COOPERATION

Great-power diplomacy implies recognition of China by the international community not as a typically developing country but rather as a great power ready to assume the corresponding responsibilities. Such potential Chinese contributions are typically framed within the context of the UN, which plays a central role in the overcoming of the international community's essential challenges including nuclear arms race, terrorism, climate change cybersecurity, etc. (Esteban, 2017).

Although both countries (China and the United States) have different ideologies and are sometimes opposing on a range of issues, they have a long history of cooperation. According to Dean (2012), many Chinese leaders drew inspiration from the American political system. Notable among them is Sun Yat-Sen, the father of modern China, who modeled his "Three Principles of the People" Philosophy after Abraham Lincoln's People-centered government. He also noted that the USA did not only support the "Open Door" policy of China, she also "insisted that China is included as one of the five Permanent Members of the U.N. Security Council".

From 2001 to date, China-US relations have improved. There is a possible explanation for this. It has always been the norm for most incoming US Governments to promise to adopt hard-line policies towards China. However, they tend to adjust their

¹⁰ Xi Jinping's Speech at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the 18th of October 2017.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Charles Glaser "Will China's rise lead to a War"? www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67479/charles-glaser/will-china's-rise-lead-to-war

policy in the face of the reality of China's importance for US interest, especially in Asia and the world at large.

Both countries understand that a stable Middle East, South and Central Asia is necessary for the stable flow of critical commodities, hence, they cooperate to fight global terrorism, Climate Change, and promote nuclear nonproliferation. They are also involved in Bilateral Trade and Economic Relations (valued at over \$500 Billion in 2011), Peace-keeping, Peace-building missions etc. (Dean, 2012)

3.1 The De-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

It is a known fact that irrespective of their different ideologies, political, geographical and economic structure, capabilities, States will also find common ground on which to foster better relations among others, based on what they perceive as their national interest. This has been the case of the Sino-American relations regarding the North Korean Nuclear Program.

The North Korean Nuclear issue has been on the front-burner of World Politics in the last ten years, and the two countries (The USA and China) seem to have a similar stance on the issue. Between January and September 2017 alone, the DPRK has launched about six missiles, including Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles over the Japan Sea. This has caused a major rift in the region, and both the USA and China are not very pleased with it.

During the campaigns in 2016, Donald Trump had hinted that if elected president, he would take a tougher stand on trade with China. Those who thought that on assuming office as President, he would extend the same gestures to China on the North Korean nuclear program are all stupefied.

Jeff Mason¹³ reports that when President Trump met President Xi Jinping at the G20 meeting in Germany in July 2017, he referred to him as his friend. According to Trump, "As far as North Korea is concerned, we will have, eventually, success. It may talk longer than I'd like. It may take longer than you'd like. But there will be a success in the end one way or the other". President Xi opined that stronger Sino-American relations are necessary for stability and prosperity amidst global conflicts. He affirmed that China's position on the DPRK imbroglio was the de-nuclearization of the peninsula, the peaceful settlement of the issue through consultation and dialogue, under the Six-Party Talks. He further pledged that China's navy will join the U.S.-led Pacific Rim Military exercise in 2018.

It is no secret that North-Korea and China have a strong economic and military relationship. Article 2 of "Sino-North Korea Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty" of 11th July 1961 reveals that both the PRC and DPRK are expected to come to one another's aid if under any attack. (Kim Heung-Kyu, n.d)

However, the fact that China helped to enforce the UN Security Council's Resolution 2375 and 2371 which bans all North Korea's textile, coal, iron ore, lead and seafood exports and remittances by its overseas labourers and caps North Korea's oil imports is an indication that China is willing to partner with the US to bring peace and stability to the region. Currently, she is limiting oil and gas supplies to Pyongyang. Even though these sanctions will cost the DPRK over one-third of their \$3Billion annual export revenues, China has urged them to abide by the resolutions. (Wang, L., 2017)

It is true that both China and the US want North Korea to end its nuclear program. However, their motive or manners of approach differ. For example, China initiated the "six-party talks" in 2003, negotiation for a between USA, Japan, China, Russia, North Korea and South Korea to settle the disputes. In 2009, North Korea pulled out of the peace talks. However, China wants the talks to resume and has put forward a "Suspension-for-suspension proposal and dual-track approach which proposes that North Korea suspend its nuclear and missile activities and also that the USA and South Korea should also suspend their large-scale war games. (Ivanovitch,M., 2017)

While asserting that the USA is neither clamoring for regime-change nor the collapse of the regime in North Korea, the USA through its Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson affirmed that Washington is ready to dialogue with Pyongyang.

3.1.1 The Inevitability of a Sino-American Cooperation in the Korean Peninsula

Sixty years after the Korean war, there is neither peace nor any hopes of peace in the area. Instead, the Peninsula is both one of the most militarized and dangerous parts of the world, with North Korea on one side and South Korea and the USA on the other side. The claims that North Korea has procured nuclear warheads make the situation even more precarious.

Although both countries have their individual national interests, a Sino-American Cooperation is inevitable because these divergent interests can only be protected and guaranteed in a peaceful environment. For China, a peaceful Northeast Asia would reduce security pressures, create a conducive environment for the socioeconomic development of its own northeast regions and also reduce the risk of Sino-American conflict in the region. On the other hand, for the USA, a peaceful peninsula means the security of its allies in the region is guaranteed (Wu Xinbo, 2015).

China is avoiding a situation where the tensions in the already volatile region would escalate to another War. A destabilized North Korea will not serve its interest. Thus she is pleased to know that Washington is not gunning for a regime change. A scenario of a collapsed North Korean regime will most likely result chaos, leading to a flood of refugees into northeast China. China doesn't want this to happen. The over 300,000 illegal economic migrants living in China is already a handful (Glaser, 2003).

¹³ Jeff Mason (July 19, 2017) "Trump keeps it friendly with Xi at G20 on North Korea threat" Retrieved on October 20th, 2017
<https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-says-may-while-u-china-deal-north-145658882.html>

Another reason China is interested in; denuclearization of the Peninsula, maintaining peace and stability and resolving the crisis through dialogue maybe because she has too many neighbours with nuclear ability, its own thus her own national security is at risk (Kim Heung-Kyu,n.d).

Sino-American Competition

The first thing visitors to China notice is that social networking and e-commerce work differently in China. Thus, instead of Facebook, Black Friday, Twitter, Instagram, Amazon and Google (American Companies/Ideas), they'll hear about and use Weibo, 11/11, Wechat, Alibaba, QQ and Baidu. Does this say anything about Sino-American Competition?

Both Chinese and American Scholars share the opinion that China and the United States are unlikely to go to war with each other. In terms of budget for military, the USA is still ahead of China. However, they all seem to agree that an economic competition is possible. Today, while the USA is the largest economy in the world by GDP, China is the second largest economy and the Largest, in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (IMF, 2015).

Thus, scholars like Randall et'al (2011) believe that China is, on one hand, pragmatically accommodating U.S hegemony and contesting its legitimacy on the other hand.

Chu (2001) considers Sino-American relations in the 21st Century as being more of a strategic partnership. He is of the opinion that there is no basis for a Sino-American Competition because in terms of economy, military capabilities, technology, ideology and Geo-strategy, the two countries are different. For example, although China is the largest developing country, her GDP is still below that of the USA (the largest developed country). Also, unlike the strategic competition between the USSR and the USA in the cold-war era, China is not contending with the US Geo-strategically; she has neither scrambled for territory in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa or Latin America.

He acknowledges that although China is opposed to the US military presence in Asia, she has never launched an offensive attack on the USA and its military installations. Her actions have mainly been defensive. Thus, the relationship between the two cannot be competitive. Other scholars disagree with this position. For David Shambaugh, "There is nothing strategic between China and the United States that would stick them together and there is no consensus concerning Asia; on the contrary, what I see is a strategic competition in Asia and the world¹⁴." US Senator, Richard Shelby of Alabama clearly stated that "...we will never have a strategic partnership with China; we should see China as a strategic competitor; China is not our partner, and never will be. (Chu, 2001)

Even the US President, Donald Trump posted on his Facebook Page on the 9th of November 2017 that " *...I don't blame China, I blame the incompetence of past Admins for allowing China to take advantage of the U.S on trade leading up to a point where the U.S is losing \$100's of billions*" On the 10th of November, President Trump also posted that " *From this day forward, we will compete on a FAIR and EQUAL basis. We are not going to let the United States be taken advantage of anymore*". These two posts were made during the APEC 2017 summit, which was part of his working visit to China, and other Asian Countries.

Neorealists opine that interstate commerce is capable of creating tensions between trading states. According to them, " *If one state gains more than the other, particularly over a long period of time, then this asymmetry becomes a source of insecurity for the other state. The state becoming relatively weaker can solve this imbalance through several mechanisms.*"(Masterson, 2014). Does Donald Trump's opinion about Sino-American trade relations as quoted above give credence to this assertion?

Is China Really Competing with the USA?

This question has been ringing in the minds of scholars of International relations in the last decade, and the years ahead, it would form a topic for discuss.

A line of the Chinese poem "Silent Protest" reads thus '... *when we are billed to be the next superpower, we are called the threat*'. On the other hand, Barack Obama was quoted to have said that " *China is rising and it's not going away. They're neither our enemy nor our friend. They're competitors*".(Gries, P,2009)

If these statements, including those of President Trump are anything to go by, one can say that indeed, there is a Sino-American Competition in the 21st Century.

Sino-American Economic Competition in South-East Asia

Power Transition Theory opines that instability in the international system occurs when there is a change in power distribution. Thus in an area once controlled by the USA, China's rise, especially after the Asian Financial crisis of 1997, may be viewed as an attempt to challenge the hegemony of the USA. China came out strong in the aftermath of the financial crisis and is currently playing a dominant role in ASEAN, APEC, RCEP and other regional organizations. China's economic drive in Southeast Asia is focused on : ASEAN Plus Three, Asian Development Bank, the AIIB etc. US has a large military budget in Asia but increased military spending is not adequate to shore up its influence in the China-dominated region. China's rise portends a return to a multipolar distribution of power and a type of competitive great power politics not witnessed for more than half a century (Fravel, 2010:509) and battle-ground for Sino-American competition is not Military capability, but economic.

¹⁴ Jane Periz, "White House is bracing for a Chinese Backlash", The New York Times, May 16, 199.p.A11

China's influence in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is aimed at bringing the 10 members of ASEAN plus Australia, South Korea, India, Japan etc together. This can be seen as a major threat to the US influence in Asia. South-East Asia is not a push-over in terms of economy. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a combined population of over 620million and a GDP of about \$2.5 trillion (GOA Report, 2015) and both China and USA seem to be competing vigorously for dominance in the region through the establishment of CAFTA (China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement) and NAFTA (North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement). One of the reasons for such competition is not unconnected with the strategic location of the region. Southeast Asia lies at the intersection of the world's two most heavily traveled sea-lanes (Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean) on the east-west route. It also lies between Australia and New Zealand on the north-south route (Tsai, 2011).

China's good neighbor foreign policy (mulin wajiao) in the region has resulted in establishing various kinds of cooperation and partnerships such as economic relations and bilateral trade. As a result, from 1997-2010, China's imports from ASEAN increased from \$12.4 Billion to \$154.6 Billion, while its exports to ASEAN went from \$12.7 Billion to \$138.2 Billion in the same period. China's \$202.5 Billion trade with ASEAN surpassed the \$171.7 Billion US trade with ASEAN since 2007 (Tsai, 2011). Reports show that as at 2014, China's imports from ASEAN stood at \$142 Billion while its exports to ASEAN were \$272 billion. On the other hand, US imports from ASEAN were about \$142 billion and exports to ASEAN stood at \$79 billion (GAO, 2015).

Today, China is the largest trade partner of ASEAN with over \$480 billion in trade since 2014, while the USA is the fourth with over \$220 billion. It is also among the top three trading partners of each ASEAN country. The ASEAN-FTA which came into effect in 2010 created the world's largest Free Trade Area comprising 1.9 billion consumers and \$4.3 trillion in annual trade. Plans are underway to increase trade and investment to \$1 trillion and \$150 billion by 2020 and the next eight years respectively ((Gill, 2016)).

In the Bush years, the focus of US foreign policy within the Southeast Asia Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative which gave rise to the FTA negotiations with the US, was that of 'benign neglect' but with China's rise, President Obama paid more attention to Asia. During his state visit to Japan in 2009 President Obama pointed out that Asia plays a great role in US Foreign policy. According to him "...as a Asia Pacific nation, the US expects to be involved in the discussion that shape the future of this region , and to participate fully in appropriate organizations as they are established and evolve" (Hung Ming-Te, 2011).

Washington's decision to enter into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2009 was a strategy to return to Asia. The 2012 US-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement Initiative which according to (Gill, 2016), provided a framework for economic cooperation between the US and

ASEAN countries, was to pave way for them to join high standard trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Although the U.S under President Trump pulled out of the TPP in 2017, the Sino-American competition in the region is far from over. The USA pulling out of the TPP most likely affirms the realist assumption that being the main actor in international relations, states use institutions to pursue their interests and bypass them once these interests are no longer reflected in the institution.

While at the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference in 2013, President Xi acknowledged the strategic importance of China's neighbors and expressed his desire to "encourage and participate in the process of regional economic integration , speed up the process of building up infrastructure and connectivity" through building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. According to Justin Yifu, the Belt and Road initiative was launched to counter-balance U.S Policies such as 'the Pivot to Asia' and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Cai, 2017).

Sino-American Competition is as a result of a lack of strategic trust. Richard Bitzinger posits that "...Washington has cited concerns about Beijing's steady as a direct threat to its allies and interests in the Asia-Pacific (Bitzinger, R., 2015)

The US and China are competing with each other for both political and economic influence in Southeast Asia. Although the countries within the region are well aware that they cannot avoid being a part of the ambit of the big powers, their utmost desire is to manage their relations with the two countries so they do not become victims of the emerging power rivalry. Thus they try not to fall within the exclusive sphere of influence of any one great power alone (Gill,B 2016)).

It would seem that the realist pessimistic assumption that absence of a higher authority above state actors heightens the struggle for state survival in an anarchic international environment applies to how the Southeast Asian countries relate with China and the USA. The state of anarchy creates intense security competition among the actors where states can never fully ascertain the intentions of others. They therefore resort to closing the security gap and maximizing their chances of survival through either increasing power capabilities or aligning to other states with increased power capabilities. (Masterson, 2014). While Southeast Asia continues to pursue economic exchange with China, many states within the region have sought stronger security relations with the USA to guard against "China threat". The Philippines and Thailand are major U.S allies. The US and the Philippines signed a Mutual Defence Treaty in 1951 and the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1991. On the other hand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar are largely China's allies. Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei (hedgers) have neither treaty nor ideological alliances with the two powers.

Countries like the Philippines and Vietnam are behind the USA in matters such as the South China Sea disputes. China's insistence that the US steer clear of the territorial dispute may

be perceived as its attempt to consolidate its influence in the region, in the light of its expanding economy. Presently, China is making concerted efforts at gaining the trust of ASEAN countries: its attempt to restore diplomatic relations with the Philippines is a step in that direction. (CGTN Official, 2017)

If she successfully keeps the US from gaining more ground in the region, she could become the hegemon. But “as long as China continues to expand in power and the US continues to invest efforts in response to China’s rise, Southeast Asia will be critical to a Sino-American competition” (Hung Ming-Te, 2011).

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank VS the IMF

In his first tenure as President, Xi Jinping rolled-out certain initiatives that would see China play a dominant role in international Politics. The establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (formerly known as One Belt One Road) are a few of the projects initiated by President Xi to actualize his objective.

The AIIB for instance was created in 2015 to facilitate China’s economic drive. Maral Noori et al noted that the unbalanced governance structures in the IMF and World Bank (controlled largely by the USA) made China not only feel slighted but also unwelcome in global financial discussions. As a result, China created the Bank to push its own economic growth and also to offer developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America less stringent terms for development aid, investment capital and trade. The wide acceptability of the Bank across many countries outside Asia is worrisome to the US. Major powers like Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Australia swiftly joined and ratified the statutes of the bank, to the chagrin of the USA. Instead of joining the AIIB, the United States, Canada and Japan chose the ADB (Asian Development Bank), controlled by Japan, a US ally (Ito, 2015).

Apart from being startled by Germany, France and Italy’s decision to join the bank, being that these nations are supposed to be more inclined towards the U.S and her interests, Washington’s efforts to halt the AIIB and prevent Britain from joining, is an indication that she doesn’t trust Chinese foreign investment and could be a pointer to its diminishing level of economic and diplomatic influence, especially in Asia. The rise of the Bank could spell doom for the IMF and the World Bank and the ADB in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

The future of Sino-American relations is a major concern for international relations’ scholars around the world. This concern is particularly fueled by the concept of ‘China’s rise and its effect on power relations in the international system. Realist Pessimists predict competition and conflict in the future of Sino-American relations. In their Opinion, “rising

powers seek not only to secure their frontiers but to reach out beyond them, taking steps to ensure access to markets, materials, and transportation routes; to protect their citizens far from home, defend their foreign friends and allies and promulgate their values; and, in general, to have what they consider to be their legitimate say in the affairs of their region and of the wider world”. (Friedberg, 2005:19). The expansion of states like the U.K, France, Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union and the USA was as a result of the industrial revolution. Thus, realist pessimists believe that China will go the same route. If it does, conflicts and confrontation between China (the rising power) and the USA (hegemonic power) will be the most likely occurrence because according to Mearsheimer, “China, like all previous potential hegemon (will) be strongly inclined to become a real hegemon” (Friedberg, A., 2005:16-20).

For the Liberal Optimists, the future of China-U.S relation will be characterized by Cooperation. According to them, economic interdependence between them such as the Bilateral economic Exchange, increased trade volume, International institutions (WTO, UN Security Council, ASEAN Plus 3, APEC, etc.) and democratization which are “interrelated and mutually reinforcing causal mechanisms”, will make a Sino-American Cooperation inevitable. Economic Exchange between China and the U.S for example, rose from \$120 billion to 245 billion in 2004. Thus, these Scholars believe that more trade and investments between the two countries would mean less conflict or confrontation (Friedberg, 2005:12).

Realist Optimists tend to agree with Liberal optimists on the absence of confrontation in the future of Sino-American Relations. For China, economic growth is a major concern. It aims at developing its economy for the betterment of its teeming population. Thus, “Its ambition are, and are likely to remain ‘modest, even conservative’ and “the likelihood that Beijing will want (or be able) to mount a serious challenge to the United States is therefore small” (Friedberg, 2005:24-28). They further assert that unlike 1950s and 1960s when China’s goal was to spread communism in Asia, she is concerned with her economic development and the protection of her territorial integrity. Thus, if the USA respects China’s sovereignty and national interest in issues like the South-China Sea disputes, Taiwan, etc.,

Sino-American relations in the future will be characterized by cooperation (partnership) or worse, strategic competition, instead of confrontation (Friedberg, 2005:27).

Esteban refers to China’s foreign policy under President Xi as one with neo-liberal institutionalism; a concept which has been a recurrent decimal in China’s foreign policy since the cold-war era. According to him, President Xi believes that since we live in a globalized and an interdependent world with large potential for establishing relations that are mutually beneficial, the view that international relations are a zero-sum game is fast becoming obsolete. Thus, Xi’s foreign policy (as inspired by Hu Jintao’s “Theory of Peaceful rise”) emphasizes

the high level of interdependence among countries through conflict resolution, free international trade, and tolerance for the models of sociopolitical organization of other countries (Esteban, 2017). In the past, China had been criticized for taking advantage of the current international order and not assuming responsibilities. However, China under Xi Jinping has become more active in global affairs. Its commitment to environmental protection, maintenance of peace globally and her assistance to developing countries is laudable and his commitment to foster a Sino-American relations built on Cooperation is noteworthy.

Although the concept of Great power politics which according to President Xi is a new Model of major-country relations is often defined in very vague terms, the speeches contained in this section of The Governance of China suggest somewhat more specific rationales and features (assuming that the inclusion of such elements in this section indicates a linkage with the model). The rationale behind this objective and its attendant features include; an emphasis on mutual benefit and deepened cooperation among nations over “Cold War” era zero-sum thinking and various “hegemonistic,” power-centred policies and behaviour; enhanced bilateral dialogues and communication, deepened military-to-military relations, deepened trade and more open markets and a focus on multilateralism, a fundamentally defensive and non-threatening military stance; and a “comprehensive, common, and cooperative security” architecture for Asia and the world.

Xi Jinping is arguably the most influential leader of modern China. On account of its booming economy and other elements of power, China is a force to reckon with in world politics. As such, one would expect that his foreign policy will; follow the norm of international relations today (non-zero sum), confirm the opinion that China is a revisionist state, by challenging the current unipolar system controlled by the USA. China’s actions in the south and East China seas, its creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and its pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative is being greeted with suspicion (Varral, 2015). Xi has for the umpteenth time reiterated that China would continue to follow the part of “peaceful development”. Thus, Beijing neighbors and other major partners can be at ease because China’s rise will be peaceful and will only be pursued with an eye towards achieving “win-win” outcomes. (Johnson & Glaser, 2014).

China and the United States cannot afford to go to war now, and in the future as a war between the two countries will not only be detrimental to their economy and territory but the whole world will feel the heat. Thus, a Sino-American Confrontation is not desirable, not now, not in the future.

Neoliberalism preaches win-win cooperation and China’s commitment to diplomatically cooperate with the US over North Korea, Syria, and Iran as well as its willingness to allow foreign companies in the service sector to operate more freely are noteworthy. (Yingyong, 2015).

Beijing proposes a new form of relations between the great powers, one based on respect, equality and mutual benefit, instead of on hegemonism and confrontation, and on association as opposed to alliances. This type of relations between great powers implies that each recognize the fundamental national interests of the others. In China’s case this is made concrete by its objective to achieve socioeconomic development peacefully, much like the traditional powers when they firmly defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. (Esteban, 2017)

The two countries would need to work together to bring lasting peace and stability to the already “troubled” world. The crisis in the Korean Peninsula needs serious attention. I am positive that the Six Party talks (with DPRK, ROK, Japan, USA, Russia and China) can help bring lasting peace to the Peninsula if all hands are on deck.

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