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Sino-U.S. Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Is it Thucydides' Trap?

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the Sino-U.S. rivalry and the possibility of hot conflict. The realist scholars analyzed the current paradigm through the lens of the realist perspective. The realist views it in the context of the U.S.-USSR, Cold War, and 'Thucydides' Trap. In contrast, the liberalist views it with the liberalist spectrum. Scholars view the current rivalry in the old theories, like the previous chronicles, such as the Thucydides trap and the Cold War. However, they may analyze the paradigm from new angles, with ground facts. Find the solution in between the realist and liberalist points of view. Strategic competition does not mean war and destruction; it implies that powers compete in geopolitics. The term Strategic Competition came into practice during the détente era, in the 1970s, when both powers i.e. the US and USSR were in a tough Cold War rivalry, but through negotiation, tension was reduced. The U.S-China are in strategic competition and they will reduce the rivalry and not go to war. China wants to gain superpower status without war, believing Sun Tzu's philosophy 'To win without fighting is better than winning with losses'. It's normal in international relations that powers achieve their interest through military power, diplomacy, trade, and aid. Power, helps states to get tactical and bargaining leverage. China's behavior and pattern show that China did not colonize foreign land, noninterference foreign policy, and did not influence its economic or political ideology on other governments. Hence, there is no possibility of Thucydides' trap.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, two great powers, advanced in technology are in strategic competition. Scholars and pundits of International relations are thinking, about what will be the outcome of strategic completion. The scholars of the realist mindset are viewing the whole with the lens of a realist perspective, and the 1990s Cold War. At the same time, the liberalists view the whole perspective with the liberalist spectrum. Everyone views the current competition in the old theories, according to the previous history and records, such as Thucydides' trap. There is no doubt that a few patterns or paradigms repeated periodically and sometimes appeared with the closest results. Sometimes the same pattern occurs but the time and characters are not the same as in the old paradigm, as it happened in Greek history. So to understand the pattern, first need to understand the contemporary period and the Greek period of history and time. The time and charters are changed, however, it raises the question; Can the contemporary great powers avoid the Thucydides' trap?

Thucydides was a Greek historian and a military general, he is also called the father of history. He wrote the history of the Peloponnesian War (460-395 BC). He was a rational person, and his focus of the study was human intelligence and judgment, fortune and necessity, and the idea that history is too irrational and inestimable to predict. He presented the idea of 'Thucydides' Trap'. It is the deadliest pattern of ancient history. According to the 'Thucydides' Trap', when a rising power (China) threatens to displace a ruling power (America), the most

likely outcome is war. Twelve of sixteen cases of which occurred in the past 500 years and ended violently.

In the book 'Destined for War' Graham Allison articulated; why Thucydides' Trap is the best lens, to comprehend the 21st century's most critical foreign policy issue. The US-China rivalry can be comprehended through the Thucydides' Trap. He described it as a tendency pattern towards a war. When an emerging power threatens to displace an existing great power, then war is inevitable.

About 2500 years back, in Greece, there were two city-states Sparta and the other was Athens. Sparta was a great power in the region, while Athens was the rising power, and it threatened the Spartans' supremacy. Thus the war was inevitable, and they battled for 27 years to gain victory over the other. Finally, Spartans got victory over Athens after the long war. In history, this war is called the Peloponnesian War. The Peloponnesian War began in 431 BC and ended in 404 BC.

The U.S.-China conflict is increasing day by day, the conflict began on the trade and trade tariffs. However, the trade war has turned into a new 'strategic competition'. The U.S. and China bilateral trade relations became tense in 2018; when Donald Trump imposed punitive tariffs on China—Trump administration-imposed restrictions on Chinese-biased commercial practices, foreign investment, and high-tech products. In reaction, China also imposed restrictions on the U. S. export items. Further, Joe Biden did not end the trade restriction but strengthened the anti-China policies and alliances. Biden considers the US-China conflict as "a battle between the utility of democracies in the twenty-first century and autocracies. (Huang, 2021).

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The U.S.-China strategic competition, in the Indo-Pacific and the other regions will appear as a “new type of Great Power Relations.” Because strategic competition means rivalry not war, states are pursuing their interests through military power, diplomacy, trade, and aid. The physical power provides a tactical advantage over the opponents. So it means that in international relations states are going through competition, but it does not mean that they must go through the war like the “Thucydides trap”. However, there is the possibility of proxy wars and diplomatic clashes. The leadership of both states is very rational so they must avoid war in the presence of nuclear weapons. Our global world is large and blessed with land, mountains, and Oceans so all the powers can live in peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term strategic competition first came into use in the détente era, in the 1970s, when both powers i.e. the U. S and USSR were in a tough Cold War rivalry. Senator Edward W. Brooke used the term “strategic competition” in his notes. They were engaged in extreme arms races and made nuclear weapons, short-, medium-, and long-range Intercontinental ballistic missiles. In the 1970-1980 era, arms limitation conferences were held due to which arms limitations were signed and arms reduced. Strategic competition idea leads the states to negotiate, cooperate, and ease the tension. (Winkler, 2023).

The term strategic competition denotes that powerful countries are in intense competition, and the competition in the domains of military, economics, and culture. However, in the scholarly discussion, it became a reality and fact that the powerful states are in inevitable competition. Though, scholars have discussed the struggle for power and politics. Powers must avoid escalation and move to peace for a better peaceful world. (Winkler, 2023).

China emerged as a strategic competitor in the 1990s, and then in 2000. George W. Bush’s administration used the term ‘strategic competition’ for China. Whereas Clinton’s administration allowed China to join, the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. So to reduce the conflict between the two powers, and make cordial relations with China. (Hillman, 2022).

The U.S.-China are great economic powers with a marvelous history of culture and civilization. China is a civilization state more than a nation-state, and its citizens are more proud of their culture and civilization. Same as American citizens are proud of their civilization, culture, and nationality. America is famous for its advancement in technology, diplomacy, and trade. Same as China is famous all over the world for its technology and trade diplomacy. U.S.-China relations are very old; however, relations were highlighted in the period of 1970s, after the Nixon visit to China. The purpose of the visit was to make cordial, political, trade relations with China. However, later on, the relations modified into strategic competition (Xia, 2014; Winkler, 2023).

History reveals that rivalry or competition between the

states was for three reasons i.e. power, security, and glory. These three reasons are the basic causes of strategic competition. Within the last four decades, China has shown amazing development in its economy, military, weapons, and foreign policy. According to the Power transition theory, China is rising in power and challenging the existing power through its economy, military, and high-tech weapons, and challenging the current hierarchal order and geopolitics through its vibrant policies. (Thompson, 2001).

Today china’s trade diplomacy functions as a magical tool, and it has changed geopolitics rapidly. China is giving a hard challenge to the well-established international system. China is facing and providing, challenges through its economic strategies in the Indo-Pacific region, the Indian Ocean, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. China is connected with the world through land, water, air, and cyber technology. China is not only challenging America, in the Indo-Pacific region, but also challenging India, Japan, Australia, and many regional states. The Indo-Pacific region has appeared in global politics as the strategic Centre of gravity. (Köllner et al., 2021).

In 2010 China announced itself as the second economic power and struggling to rise as an assertive global power. As a civilization state, China’s ambition is to regain its past glory, and now China is seeking its ambition to become the number one economic power and second superpower in geopolitics. (Naarajärvi, 2018). Currently, America is the number one economy and lone superpower. Whereas the American military is the strongest, military in the world with advanced weapons. (Qiao-Franco & Zhu, 2022).

According to the intelligentsias, China has developed its expertise in industries, Artificial Intelligence, technology, and high-tech weapons. It is expected that in the upcoming days, China’s economy will supersede the U.S. economy. (Qiao-Franco & Zhu, 2022; Qiao-Franco & Zhu, 2022). Presently, the U.S. armed forces, Air Force, and Naval forces have superiority over other countries including China. The Air Force can do great damage to any state. However, China is reducing that gap. (Krepinevich Jr, 2001).

In 2016, Donald Trump argued that China is a rival state of America and a new strategic competition began between the U.S. and China. The rivalry between the powers is not only limited to the economy, but it’s to technology, trade, and trade tariffs. The rivalry transformed from an economic and trade rivalry to an arms race. However, these days the conflict and competition are on technology, trade, trade routes, and arms race. (Lippert et al., 2020). In-depth, the competition between the U.S. and China is for power politics and to gain power in the international system. According to Hobbes, states are interested in power, security, and glory. Studies show that both states working hard to gain power and sway in geopolitics. (Hout & Ghemawat, 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a review of qualitative research. The research is based on qualitative analysis. Secondary data was collected from the research papers and research books. The data provided evidence that the U.S.-China are in a strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean.

Objective

The objective of the research.

- To examine, the strategic competition between the U.S.-China
- To examine, Thucydides' trap and the Possibility of War

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Debate on the Time and Pattern and Cause of Strategic Competition. (Discussion & Result)

In the 21st century, two affluent advanced powers are in strategic competition. International relations pundits are pondering, what will be the consequences of strategic competition. In the present scenario, everyone thinks according to their knowledge, experience, mindset, and results. However, it is necessary to understand current strategic competition, according to the time, technology, and possibilities. The ground realities of the 21st century are entirely different from the 'Thucydides trap'. (3000-2000 BCE). (Allison, 2017). In the context of the 'Thucydides trap,' it's not easy to predict the future, especially war, because time and patterns are unpredictable. (Winkler, 2023).

The realist scholars analyzed the current paradigm through the lens of the realist perspective. The realist views it in the context of the U.S.-USSR Cold War. While the liberalist views the whole situation with the liberalist spectrum. Scholars view the current rivalry in the old theories, according to the previous chronicles, such as Thucydides trap. There is no doubt that some paradigms are repeated periodically, and with similar closest results. (Harvey, 1990).

However, sometimes the same patterns occur, but the time and characters are not the same as in the old paradigm, as it happened in Greek history. To understand the pattern, it is essential to comprehend contemporary time, space, characters, and politics. With the same objective understand the ancient times, space characters, and politics in the ancient Greek period, and today in the 21st century. Think, about the question; what's the possibility of Thucydides' trap? (Friedland & Boden, 1994).

Thucydides was a Greek historian and a military general, he is also called the father of history. He wrote the history of the Peloponnesian War (460-395 BC). He was a rational person, and his focus of the study was human intelligence and judgment, Fortune and Necessity, and the idea that history is too irrational and inestimable to predict. He presented the idea of 'Thucydides' Trap'. It is the deadliest pattern of ancient history. According to Thucydides' Trap, when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one, the most likely outcome is war.

Twelve of sixteen cases of which occurred in the past 500 years and ended violently (Lee, 2019).

Graham Allison wrote in his book; Thucydides' Trap is the best lens, to comprehend the 21st century's most critical foreign policy issue. The US-China rivalry can be comprehended through the Thucydides' Trap. He described it as a tendency pattern towards a war. When an emerging power threatens to displace an existing great power, then war is inevitable. About 2500 years back, in Greece, there were two city-states Sparta and the other was Athens. Sparta was a great power in the region, while Athens was the rising power, and it threatened the Spartans' supremacy. Thus the war was inevitable, and they battled for 27 years to gain victory over the other. Finally, Spartans got victory over Athens after the long war. In history, this war is called the Peloponnesian War. The Peloponnesian War began in 431 BC and ended in 404 BC (Lee, 2019).

Now if we see the US-China in the same place as Sparta and Athens, it raises a question; will the US-China escape from war? This can be studied under different questions, and Alison raised questions in the discussion. If we see the different patterns in history during the 500 years, about 16 cases emerged in world history. In 12 cases, the rival powers went to war, while only in 4 cases the powers, escaped or avoid war. Why do the powers go to war? Why did the powers escape from the war? Those powers went to war and did not resolve the conflict through peaceful dialogue, they used military power to resolve the conflict. However, four states escaped and resolved the issues through negotiation (Lee, 2019).

About more than 76 years, the U.S. has established a world order, and everything has happened according to the organized system of Liberal order. After the demise of Russia and the Cold War, the USA emerged as the sole superpower and functioned as a global superpower. However, after 2010, China emerged as a second economic global power by replacing Japan as a third economic power. While USA remained the number one economy because the USA's GDP was more than China's economy. Now according to the different economists, in the future, China's economy can be equal to the USA, or China may supersede the USA. American presidents Donald Trump and Biden considered China an economic rival or competitor to the USA and a threat to the American interest in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. (Ikenberry, 2005; Grosz, 2020).

3000 BC, situations and conditions, are not possible and applicable in the 21st century. Why? Because we are living in a modern world. In ancient times King was ruling and the king had decisive power. For example, Agis II was the king of Sparta (died 400 or 398 BC), and he ordered the Peloponnesian War (431-404) against Athens. Society was not as empowered as today. In ancient society, citizens were trained to obey the king, and due to their learned behavior, they did not have the power to speak in government affairs. (Friedland & Boden, 1994; Carr, 2024).

However, in the 21st century public opinion does matter in the outcome of policies, and in the elections of the president and Prime Minister. Mostly in the world public is much empowered and they have a “say” in government affairs. Pierson (2000). The American public is modern and knows their civil rights. The American public cannot be in favor of war and bloodshed. In China there is no democracy and the public does not have the same civil rights as the American and European states. However, still, Chinese citizens still have a value system and they live according to their values. So the Chinese public will also condemn war (Kaldor, 2013; Gertz, 2000; Brewer, 2011).

Further in the old times, the war was fought traditionally, by manpower and swords. Today’s warfare is very destructive because today both rival powers are equipped with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and hypersonic missiles. In a few seconds, a region will be destroyed and the rival powers know it. The records of the old wars such as World War I, World War II, and A Few Days’ War show that war is a cause of destruction nothing else (Demause, 2013; Grosz, 2020).

A few days’ war pushed nation-states thirty years back. Thus the decision of war is not in favor of any state. So in the present time, everything has changed. So there is no possibility of Thucydides’ Trap or war possibility. However, there is the possibility of conflicts on trade, technology or other short-range conflicts are possible (Demause, 2013; Brewer, 2011).

China’s Behavior and Pattern

A state’s behavior and pattern can be studied through a scientific approach. Leaders are making decisions and policies for the states, therefore, a pattern and behavior of the state can be understood scientifically in sociology pattern and behavior studies on the scientific approach. In the scientific approach, it can be studied what was the behavior of the state in different timelines and how it reacted in specific conditions. Patterns of behavior are formed by brains and people (Kelso, 2000).

These patterns impact surroundings and change with time. For example, the behavior of states and their people changed after the World War one and World War two. The behavior of states was different during the terrorism and COVID-19 (Ackerman & Peterson, 2020).

Chinese history depicts that Chinese civilization grew 5000 years ago in East Asia. Chinese civilization developed in northern China around the Yellow River and Yangtze River. China’s history and civilization are unique, and the people of China are proud of their cultural heritage. China’s civilization developed with time, and during the different periods a specific writing style, art, philosophy, state politics, and administrative system developed. China’s history and culture are unique in world history due to the development of philosophy, knowledge, and unique culture. Chinese Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, social cultural values impacted its society and the neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Zhang, 2012).

Different dynasties ruled China such as Xia, followed by the Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han. The Zhou dynasty ruled for the longest period more than 800 years and 37 emperors ruled China. However, all dynasties contributed to its history, culture, politics, science, economy, and prosperity. All Chinese dynasties worked for the defense and economic development of China and its people, and still today that is in practice of China’s political culture. The Qin dynasty, Shi Huangdi constructed the Great Wall of China to protect its people from barbarians. Chinese people love their, history, culture of civilization. Therefore, the Chinese are more civilization state than nation-states and that is the cause of patriotism and strength of China. This spirit is present in the Chinese Communist Party(CCP), and its political structure, foreign policy, and development of society. (San, 2014).

China’s people and leadership never forget the National Humiliation of the past and it has become the cause of the rise of China. China developed its rational foreign policy and acted very sensibly in the international system. China is cleaning up all the humiliation through its hard work and wise policies. China is acting as the old soul of an old man because China behaves as a wise old man with a mature perspective. China is not giving a quick reaction in international politics. China never exposes its policies, and development projects until it is complete. (Callahan, 2009).

China’s policies are moving around the economy, defense, and prosperity. China’s strong economy motivated and boosted its foreign policy (Wang, 2005). Historically, China never colonized any country or enslaved other countries. Zhao (2014). China is the second economic power and rising second economic power in the world. Different international relations pundits have different ideas. According to Mearsheimer (2019), when China comes into power China will influence the world through its power. Whereas China mostly deals in international politics with its economic diplomacy and soft power. (Chen et al., 2009).

China did not use its hard power to interfere in the different countries or invade. Though China is developing its conventional and non-conventional weapons. China’s Claim in the South China Sea and presence in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Oceans shows that China has a hegemonic agenda. China’s Foreign policy changed after COVID-19. China’s foreign policy changed from a low-key profile to a high-key profile. Sometimes China’s policy appears as a wolf warrior policy. That can be seen in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Oceans. China has a conflict with Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea. However, China avoids the conflict and never gives a harsh expression quickly, but tries to resolve the conflict through diplomacy and peace talks. China avoided border skirmishes with India and at the same time avoided the U.S. during the conflicting cyber issues, and U.S. spy airplane collisions (Weimar, 2013).

China pursues its vital interests through trade and economic investment. While the US pursues its interests

through military power, aid, and funds. America avoided nuclear war or large-range war with Russia during the Cold War and after the Cold War with other countries. The US achieves its defense objective through proxy wars. After 9/11, the US attacked Afghanistan in (2001) to terminate the Al-Qaeda terrorists from Afghanistan. Same as the attack on Iraq in (2003) due to the violent policies of Saddam Hussain, and the threat of weapons of Mass Destruction. (Mearsheimer, 2019). Though in Iraq the U.S. could not get weapons of mass destruction, there was the threat of extremism and terrorism. The US avoids the large range of war and struggles to maintain peace in the World. Same as up until now, China has no historical record of a large range of wars or control of another state. (Allison, 2017).

China's behavior and pattern show that China did not colonize foreign land, its noninterference in foreign policy, and did not influence its economic or political ideology on other governments. Hence, there is no possibility of Thucydides' trap. However strategic competition exists between the rival powers.

The US-China Competition for Power Competition

The U.S. and China are in strategic competition and competition is to gain power and get control of the sea trade routes in the Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean. China is shaping geopolitics through its economic diplomacy policy. At the same time, the U.S. strengthened its power in the Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean through alliances.

China is a rising power, because of its stable economy, advanced military, weapons, trade diplomacy, and effective foreign policy. China's position has become stronger due to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project, and trade and investment projects in the Indo-Pacific region. The analyst views the (BRI) and the Indo-Pacific region differently but both projects are for trade and economy. The (BRI) is a geo-economic cooperation project with geopolitical and geostrategic importance. (Zongyi, 2019). The Indo-Pacific region has geo-economics and geostrategic importance. It will impact globalization, and global connection differently in geopolitics. The (BRI) will connect the world through the Silk Road. However, the U.S. and its allies have reservations about the (BRI) and Indo-Pacific region trade and economic investment in the Indo-Pacific states because it can reduce the influence of the capitalist system in the region. Therefore, the Trump regime designed an "Indo-Pacific" strategy, to counter, and contain China. (Zongyi, 2019).

In 2012, President Obama was the first to proclaim the Pivot to Asia-Pacific policy. The purpose of the policy was to enhance bilateral security and trade alliances with the East Asian states. It was also part of the policy to make good relations with rising China. The main purpose of the security policy was to prevent the rise of the hegemon and safeguard free trade navigation. From, 2010 to 2024, three U.S. Presidents Obama, Donald Trump, and President Biden enhanced the Asia Pacific

policy (Saeed, 2017).

For China, the (BRI) is a domestic and international development project, the (BRI) project helped to establish industries in the Middle and Western China. While on the international level, the Silk Road is in progress in different countries. Silk Road is not only a China project but many states' interest is connected with the Silk Road. Most states extended their cooperation to enhance and enlarge the (BRI) project. The (BRI) project was extended because China integrated with global values, and opened to the international market. The (BRI) provided an opportunity to enlarge the project in more than 130 countries, China invested a lot in the development of infrastructure, such as roads, railways, gas pipelines, solar projects, energy projects, etc. China's influence has increased in Eurasia, Africa, Asia, and Europe because many countries joined the project to get economic and industrial benefits (Deng, 2021; Shi & Yao, 2019).

According to China the (BRI) is a geo-economics, industrial development project. It will help to establish industries in those areas where there are no industries. It will assist in building infrastructure and industries in the underdeveloped areas. While it is difficult for the U.S. to believe that it's only a development industrial project. According to the U.S., it is a dual double-prong project with two perspectives geo-economics and geopolitics but it benefits only China strategically. It has short and long-term effects on geopolitics and geo-economics. America also has reservations that (BRI) develop the "Eurasia Supercontinent," in that America has no role to act as an effective power. This is the reason that the (BRI) has to get strategic importance in geopolitics (Zongyi, 2019).

Significance of Indo-Pacific (IP) Region and U.S Allies' Counter-Strategy

According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States of America is an Indo-Pacific nation. The Indo-Pacific is important for America due to its geopolitics, geo-economics, and strategic significance. It is not only important for America and its allies for trade but also from a security point of view. The region is populated by half of the world's population, and it accounts for 60 %, of global GDP and 2/3 of global financial growth. In 2022, about \$2 trillion was grown through the Indo-Pacific (IP) trade. Many states of Asia and European economies are dependent on the Indo-Pacific trade and trade sea route. (Larsen, 2024; U.S. State. Govt, 2024)

States around the Indo-Pacific(IP) have their specific (IP) strategies and concepts. Australian and Indian scholars highlighted the geopolitical importance of the (IP). While the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries have their strategic concept of Indo-Pacific(IP) strategies. Indo-Pacific(IP) significance has enhanced after China's rise in geopolitics and China's presence in the Indo-Pacific(IP). Indo-Pacific(IP) has a global significance, because of the large Ocean Sea route and marine resources. Australia, Japan, India, and neighboring states are upset, due to China's rising

assertive power in the Indo-Pacific(IP), and they wish that America plays its role to contain China in the Indo-Pacific region (Zongyi, 2019).

The strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific is different for different states. China is executing trade and economic diplomacy as an instrument to influence geopolitics. China is enhancing its control in the (IP) through heavy investment. The shape of geopolitics has been changed, due to China's economic projects, such as the BRI project, and investment in the Indo-Pacific. Trade routes are very important for the U.S., Japan, Australia, India, and the rest of the world, because trade routes are linked to the states prosperity and security of the states. However, China is dominating the trade routes through its economic activities in the region. (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020).

Indo-Pacific region has a strategic significance, because of its security and free trade movement. Its strategic importance is heightened owing to China's presence in the region. China's presence created a threat in the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific neighboring states and the global powers are threatened, if China's control is enhanced in the region, maybe China hinder the free movements of trade ships. America, Australia, Japan, and India are observing China as a mutual threat. (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020).

Indo-Pacific" has become the focus of gravity, due to China's rising presence in the Indo-Pacific (IP) and due to America and regional powers ' vital interest, enhanced in the region. China's strategic policy "String of Pearls" is a network of Chinese military and commercial establishments. China's Navy in the Indo-Pacific (IP) and Indian Ocean (IOR) strengthened China's position in oceans. On the other hand, it is a threat to the global powers and the regional states. In response, America supports India to counter China in the Indian Ocean. (Talone, 2019).

The necklace of diamonds is an India-U.S. strategy to counter China's "The String of Pearls" in the Indian Ocean. China built its ports in 'Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Myanmar. India brought its counter-strategic policy 'the necklace of diamonds' increased its navy and established its military bases in the regional states, of Oman, Iran, Myanmar, Singapore, and Bangladesh, and the Middle Corridor" program i.e. (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), is a trade route from the Black Sea and the Caucasus to the Central Asian steppe. It is an important artery linking the markets of China, East Asia, and Europe). Though India-China tension has increased in the Indian Ocean, but, it's a struggle to gain supremacy in the Indian Ocean. The rival powers adopt different approaches to counterbalance each other, in the Indian Ocean (Parikh, & Kureshi, 2024).

America organized a trilateral military security organization, with Australia, the UK, and the U.S., titled "AUKUS", This is a strategy to counter China in the Indo-Pacific region. The objective is to provide nuclear submarines for regional security in Australia. President Biden argued that alliances help to maintain peace and

stability in the Indo-Pacific region (Perot, 2021).

The U.S. framed a policy in 2017-2018, Donald Trump gave the(NDS), a policy that was carried on by Biden in 2024. i.e. National Defense Strategy (NDS), a balanced and nonviolent approach to counter China. For that America enhanced the resiliency of institutions, and alliances, to counter China (Trump, 2017).

Through Resiliency and alliances, the U.S. and its allies will compel China to stop or reduce strategies against the U.S. and its allies' interests. At the same time America, will compete with China and cooperate with China, where the interest aligns. In the report, it was written that the U.S. was not against the progress of China. (Trump, 2017). In 2022, the Biden government launched the Indo-Pacific Strategy. U.S. Department of Commerce has planned to operate in collaboration with partners and allies to make the Indo-Pacific region a free open, and secure, trade route.

Result: in the View of above Discussion: the Probability of Thucydides' Trap

Result

China and the US are responsible states and they are led by sensible leadership. They are not on the edge of a war. However, both powers are betrothed in serious strategic competition. In the present situation, there is no existence of a hot war because both states are well-balanced political actors in the international system. The rational powers are conscious of each other warfare capability and power potentials. It's a common practice that states pursue their interest through power, diplomacy, and trade. Therefore, states are competing with each other and competition behavior is normal between the states. However, the leadership must avoid the hard and fast extreme decisions and escalation policies.

Thucydides was a Greek historian and a military general, he transcribed the history of the Peloponnesian War (460-395 BC). The idea that history is too illogical and incalculable to predict the future, especially about the war between two great powers. History is giving us a lesson to learn. What are the possibilities that could happen in the future? How can we escape from the tragedies? How to escape from manmade and natural catastrophes? How to escape from the idea of 'Thucydides' Trap'? It is the deadliest war pattern in ancient history. According to Thucydides' Trap ' , when a small power rises and becomes a powerful state, that becomes a challenge for an existing superpower. That rising power wants to be recognized as a great power. For that purpose, the rising power threatens the existing great power? (Lee, 2019; Allison, 2017).

According to the 'Thucydides' Trap', the rising power not only threatens the existing power but struggles to displace the ruling one. As a result, it is becoming a cause of the deadliest battle. Twelve of sixteen cases of which occurred in the past 500 years and ended violently. The power transition theory explains that a rising power wants to rise as a great power and to rule. However, it is becoming the cause of dangerous war. The same phenomenon

Graham Allison; explained in his book. However, it is difficult in the 21st century because today there is no such similarity, between the U. S. and China. The 21st century is the century of revolution and evolution, but it's not for the large war or World War III. Today, the great powers conflict but they are not on the threshold to go for the war. This is normal for states to pursue their vital interest and they involved in strategic competition. However, this is abnormal to escalate conflict and not struggle to resolve conflict peacefully. (Cornier, 2022).

The state's conflicts, such as the major conflicts are on trade tariffs, arms race, Indo-Pacific region, and the Indian Ocean, etc. This is not weird or strange, it was happening in the past, and it's happening now and it will happen in the future. States are making decisions on a realist basis and they pursue their interest through Military power, diplomacy, trade, and aid. So both states are manufacturing high-tech weapons, short, medium, and long-range missiles ICBMs. They both have a strong military force and know the art of diplomacy and achieving their goals. (Allison, 2017; Winkler, 2023).

States possess weapons and military not only for war but to achieve tactical and psychological advantage over the enemy. Military, weapons, technology, stable economy help to bargain or get the advantage in geo-economics and geopolitics. However according to the realism theory, that stronger power goes for the war to control land and resources. Yet, in the case of China and America, they cannot go to war with each other because of nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles (Cornier, 2022).

China and the US are responsible states and they are led by sensible leadership. They are not on the edge of a war. However, both powers are betrothed in serious strategic competition. In the present situation, there is no existence of a hot war because both states are well-balanced political actors in the international system. The rational powers are conscious of each other warfare capability and power potentials (Cornier, 2022).

The records indicate that the U. S. has a preventive attack policy, they fight outside of their borders. While they attack with a logical reason. While China's records express that they have a peaceful, defensive policy. Thus currently China has no purpose and conditions of war. The competitor states are fortified with long-range Ballistic missiles, a stable economy, industries, and an educated public with a beautiful history of culture and civilization (Radzinsky, 2021).

The U.S.-China are in strategic competition, a very serious rivals, but they do not share the borders. So it's impossible to continue a conventional war. If they use ICBMs with nuclear warheads then there is a possibility, that they will destroy each other, but in that way, the whole region will destroy. They are rational actors so they will not go to war, but they avoid war (Palmore, 2003).

If the two rivals initiate war, it may turn into World War III, but currently, there is no such possibility to go for long-range war. America's military has extensive experience in war and a strong network of NATO forces. While

China's military is the top ten military forces equipped with modern weapons. However, they do not have as much fighting experience as the NATO and U.S. military have fighting experience on a global level. (Glaser, 2014). China is successful because of trade, and economy, if China indulges in war with any country, China will lose its all power and capability. China is aware of it very clearly. Therefore, China will avoid war. China avoided border skirmishes with India, which shows that China does not want a full-range war with any country. (Shafqat & Shahid, 2020).

China believes in gaining enormous power, so the enemy will be afraid and discouraged, and without war accept defeat. According to China's ancient philosophy, China wants to gain superpower status without war believing in Sun Tzu's philosophy 'To win without fighting is better than winning with losses'. China this policy is successful, for example, China developed high-tech machines and weapons. China Belt Road Initiative BRI, trade, and economic policy are very successful policies. The strong economy, military weapons diplomacy, and technology provided China stability as a great power in the international system. (Low & Teo, 2014).

China's diplomatic role and image enhanced in the geopolitics. In July 2024, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba visited China and met with the Chinese F.M Wang Yi, to get support from China. Since China has very close, cordial relations with Russia, China can convince Russia to end the war and give back Ukraine Ukraine-occupied areas.

China's diplomatic tactics are also successful as China helped Saudi Arabia and Iran to reconcile. China had border skirmishes with India but did not stop trade with India. (Garlick & Havlová, 2020). Many U.S. Multinational companies are working in China. Presently, there is no possibility of war but they try to undermine each other indirectly especially in the economy through proxy wars. Thus there is no probability of Thucydides' Trap, however, a possibility exists like proxy wars in Ukraine or Middle Eastern countries. (Tierney, 2021).

CONCLUSION

According to the above study, Strategic Competition, and Thucydides' Trap, there is no chance of large-scale war between the US and China but they are in the phase of strategic competition. Most international relations pundits view the U.S.-China Strategic Competition with the lenses of realism and with a realistic perspective. The term Strategic Competition came into practice during the détente era, in the 1970s, when both powers i.e. the U. S and USSR were in a tough Cold War rivalry. However, the strategic competition term helped, to define that both states compete, and they have to continue peace talks to avoid any conflict. Due to the peace talks, they avoided escalations and signed many treaties to reduce the arms race. The scholars are viewing the scenarios according to their mindset, and previous history and studies. The strategic competition can be studied between the two theories i.e.

Realism and liberalism. States are making decisions on the realist grounds and they are chasing their national interest, not the morality. However, still, the international system works under the rules and laws. On the other side of liberalism; liberalism discourages war but still seeks its interest under the rules and laws.

It's a common practice that states pursue their interest through power, diplomacy, and trade. Therefore, states are competing with each other and competition behavior is normal between the states. However, the leadership must avoid the hard and fast extreme decisions and escalation policies. The planet of Earth is too large, and the Indo-Pacific and Indian Oceans are too deep and large enough for trade shipping, and extraction of minerals. There is enough place for trade and exploration, so there is no need for violent conflict between the powers.

There is a clear reason that the Sino-U.S. will not go to war, because they both are rational nuclear states, they are aware of the annihilation of war. The nuclear war will be a cause of Mutual Assured Destruction(MAD) for each state. The U.S. will not continue the war in the existence of nuclear weapons until China incites war against the U.S. While China will not begin the war in the presence of U.S. Nukes.

China wants to gain superpower status without war believing in Sun Tzu's philosophy 'To win without fighting is better than winning with losses'. China's policy is successful, for example, China developed high-tech machines and weapons to influence the geopolitics.

According to the old records of international relations, when powers do not want direct war with the opponents, they can continue or promote lethal issues or proxy wars against the strong rivals. Such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam War or Afghanistan war, the Ukraine-Russia war, the North Korea nuclear issue, and the recent Hamas and Israel conflict in the Middle East, etc. In such cases, the opponents get the leverage to enhance their influence. China's chronological records and behavior pattern show that China did not colonize foreign land, had noninterference in foreign policy, and did not impose its economic or political ideology on other governments. Hence, there is no possibility of Thucydides 'trap, however the great powers are in strategic competition. Strategic competition is the normal behavior of states until they avoid escalation.

Therefore U.S.-China will never engage in war because they know the cost-benefit of the war. However, both states can begin the negotiation and make a cooperation, coordination, and peaceful coexistence strategy.

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