Abstract

This research article intends to analyze the volatile relationship between the two superpowers, China and the US. The “offensive realism” theory offers deeper insights into the geostrategy used by China in the post-Cold War period. To probe the scenario in the post-cold war period, this research firstly explores the application of geostrategy during the cold war period. Policies like Pivot to Asia, String of Pearls, One Belt & One Road (OBOR) and America’s Pacific Century have highlighted the increasing significance of geostrategy in shaping world politics today. The key research question of this article is to understand how China, the emerging global superpower, uses politics of geostrategy by its One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR) to expand its influence all over the world and to achieve the hegemonic position in the International system. This involves the balancing act of the United States to tame China in shifting world politics. The key idea of this article is to project this as the resurgence of ‘new cold war’ in terms of trade.

Key Words – Geopolitics, China, United States of America (USA), OBOR.

Introduction

“There is some self interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self interests. This is a bitter Truth” — Chanakya

For hundreds of years, countries have fought for the acquisition of ‘global power’. In the era of an anarchy system, states tend to expand their power; geographically, economically and militarily; to achieve regional hegemony. However, states often practice regional hegemony to maintain the balance of power to prevent other states to dominate the region. For instance – the United States of America acquires the hegemony over the world order. China is also following the suit by doing the same through “string-pearls theory”. As China appears to be rising to counter the US and dominate the international system, the US has to take measures to retard the growth of China and maintain a balance of power. It can be interpreted through the theory of ‘offensive realism’. (Mearsheimer, 2001)

Mearsheimer’s theory of offensive realism puts emphasis on the increasing power of nations perpetually to exercise dominance and hegemony. China possesses the ability to pursue power and compete for a hegemonic position in the world. The US also wants to maintain a balance of power by not letting China gain dominance in the region as it threatens its security. (Steinsson, 2014)

US-China Relations

China and the United States of America are a part of the Pacific Region. The relationship between China and the USA is considered to be the most popular bilateral relationship of post Cold-War period. In 2017, the GDP of the USA was $19,390.60 billion, which is 31.28% of the world’s economy. The GDP of China was $12,237.70 billion. The USA is the world’s largest economy and China is the second largest economy. When GDP is compared in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), China beats the USA in terms of GDP. Purchasing Power Parity is a measure by which the GDP of nations are accustomed for alterations in prices. (World Bank, 2017)
The population of the US is 320 million while that of China is 1.4 billion, i.e., approximately four times greater. Even with the economy facing a slowdown, China’s GDP growth rate is around 7% while that of the US is below 2.5%, i.e., nearly three times. In terms of the balance of trade, the US has a trade deficit while China enjoys a trade surplus and exports more than it imports. But in terms of Foreign Direct Investment, the US’s FDI is almost four times that of China. (Willige, 2016)

The relationship between the USA and China has always been interesting since the beginning. Starting from 1937, the US helped China in World War II under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. After a series of incidents like the Nanking Massacre (Rape of Nanking) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) Panay incident, the American public started favoring China and denounced Japan. On January 11, 1943, the Treaty for Relinquishment of Extraterritorial Rights in China (Sino-American New Equal Treaty) was signed between US and Republic of China that aimed to revise the unequal treaties that were already signed. (Perry, 1969)

During the Korean War on 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. Two blocs were created as a result of the cold war. The Soviet Union and China supported North Korea invade South Korea. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) supported South Korea by sending UN Forces. In addition, the USA provided 90% of military personnel to the UN Force. In November 1950, the
Chinese army counterattacked the UN Forces and it led to the biggest withdrawal of American military in history. Then the Truman government also decided to use nuclear weapons against Chinese and Korean military forces. Divided Korea became a very important factor affecting the relations between China and the USA. It also led to major policy changes of the USA towards the Republic of China (ROC). (Malkasian, 2001)

During the late 1970s, the governments of the USA and P.R.C (People’s Republic of China) made the Three Communiqués. It aimed to strengthen economic, technological, cultural, scientific and cultural ties between both the countries. Both the countries also reaffirmed their wish to avoid acquiring hegemony over Asia – Pacific Region to reduce the risk of international conflict. (Kulacki, 2016)

During the Vietnam War of 1970s, the USA supported South Vietnam while PRC supported North Vietnam. After America’s operation “rolling thunder”, the Chinese sent anti-aircraft units to combat South Vietnam supported by the USA. Unlike the Korean War, it was not in the advantage of the USA to invade North Vietnam as China had developed itself into a thermonuclear-armed nation by that time.

After the Vietnam War, the ties between both the nations started to deteriorate. The US was trying hard to prevent PRC from taking China’s seat in the UN. The US also placed an embargo on trading with PRC. In 1964, PRC also conducted a nuclear weapon test. Towards the end of 1960s after the end of the Vietnam War, the USSR became a possible threat to China as it could interfere in China to displace the communist government. The Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China(PRC) also indulged in Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969. The PRC was diplomatically isolated and improving relations with the US would be a useful way to counter USSR threat. In 1969, the US relaxed trade restrictions and hindrances to bilateral contacts on China. (Goh, 2005)

A major element in US-China relations is the acceptance of ping-pong diplomacy. It was an unexpected friendly encounter between ping – pong athletes of PRC and US. The American athletes were the first Americans to visit China after the communist takeover (Dube, 2011).In 1971, US president Richard Nixon revealed the mission to restore relations with China to the world and decided to visit the PRC. It led to concerns regarding the withdrawal of US support to South Korea and South Vietnam. Japan also feared that the US was forsaking them in the kindness of the PRC. In 1972, both the countries issued the Shanghai Communiqué, according to which both the countries vowed to stabilize their diplomatic ties. ‘Liaison offices’ were also set up in Washington and Beijing. Both the countries being a part of the Asia – Pacific, they decided to take action against any country which tries to attain hegemony over the region. After the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, both China and the US had their combatants in Africa against the Soviet Union and Cuba. China also had a lot of economic and security benefits by a rapprochement with the US. Under the Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology, China and the US initiated hundreds of joint research projects and cooperative programs during early 1979. It was considered the largest bilateral program. Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and the Vietnamese’s invasion of Cambodia were some events that brought the US and China much closer. In addition, arms sales were initiated by the US in China. In 1983, China was classified as a friendly developing nation in the US. (Starr, 2004)

After the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the US adjourned exchanges with China and levied economic sanctions on China. A major example of this was the US’s withdrawal of support to IMF credits for PRC.

But again, in 1996, when PRC led military exercises in the Taiwan Strait to terrify Republic of China (Taiwan), the US sent battle groups to the region. It again led to an increase in exchanges between PRC and US. In 1985, the two countries reached an agreement implementation of Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation. After the 9/11 attack on the US World Trade Center, PRC officially supported the War on Terror. The two countries also worked together against North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. Under Obama’s presidency, the two countries also worked together to address issues such as economic crises, global warming, and nuclear proliferation.
In 2012, the PRC criticized Obama’s new defense strategy that focused on isolating China from the East-Asia region by increasing its military influence in East-Asia. Obama also supported the One China Policy, which insisted Taiwan to be an inalienable part of mainland China. (Lee, 2012)

After Donald Trump was elected in 2017, the US was against the claims made by China on the South China Sea. Washington also committed Japan to defend the Senkaku Islands, which was being claimed by China. The US also sent its military vessels into Chinese territorial waters that led to the violation of Chinese and International law and disruption of order and peace and security of pertinent waters. On 1 April 2018, China enforced retaliatory tariffs on 128 categories of American goods. It affected around 3 billion $ trade or 2% of US exports to China. The Trump Administration also increased 25% tax on around 250 billion $ of Chinese goods. (Lendon, 2017)

The later part of 2018 is also known for a revolution in military undertakings. There has been a shift in these undertakings from traditional heavy-duty military hardware to high tech innovations like high-energy lasers, artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonic strike technology, big data analytics, advanced cyber capabilities, and satellite jammers. Moreover, the development of deep-sea drones has enabled the drones to discover SSBNs or ballistic-missile armed nuclear submarines. According to the Economist, America has the new long-range nuclear strike capabilities which it can use to deliver a disarming attack on a significant part of strategic forces of China & Russia. Beijing is also leading in innovating new technologies in military applications like Artificial Intelligence (AI), 3D printing, hypersonic missiles and quantum computing. (Jacob, 2019)

US and China are continuously trying to increase their influence on the Asia-Pacific region. Countries sharing the border in the South China Sea have been seeking closer ties with the US in order to respond to Chinese claims over the South China Sea.

Geo-Strategy And Cold War

Geostrategy is a policy that is guided by the use of geographical factors. It is the study of the relationship between a given State’s policies, its ties with other States, and the geographical framework. Such a strategy is often used by Dominant Nations to acquire hegemony over a region. An example of geo-strategy can be US’s formation of cold war blocs using containment strategy (American Imperialism). (Gagné, 2007)

Countries in the cold war have widely made the use of Geo-Strategy for widening their influence on other nations. The cold war began in the initial two years after the Second World War in 1945. The Soviet Union strengthened its power over the countries in the Eastern Bloc. The US adopted a global containment policy to challenge the Soviet Union. The US also created the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) alliance between 29 North American and European Nations. The two superpowers also competed for increasing their influence in Latin America and the decolonizing states of Asia and Africa. In 1962, the US positioned ballistic missiles in Italy and Turkey and the Soviet Union deployed ballistic missiles in Cuba. It was known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The phase after the Cuban crisis was a nuclear disarmament phase. This phase also includes the Sino-Soviet split, which was the withdrawal of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from the Soviet Union bloc. This period also witnessed the improving relations between PRC and US. In 1979, the Soviet Union tried to invade Afghanistan, which led to the Soviet-Afghan war, but it failed to do so. In 1989, there was a wave of revolutions in the countries of the communist bloc to throw away the communist regimes. This period was also called Fall of Nations or Autumn of Nations. On 26 January 1991, the Soviet bloc was officially dissolved leaving the world to run on a unipolar world order led by the United States. By 1989, the US had military alliances with 50 countries. (Lewis, 2005)

At present, the US remains to sustain its military prevalence globally. With the rise of emerging powers like China, the US appears to be losing its political and economic influence in a lot of regions. (Gardner, 2014)

The cessation of the Soviet Union led to the end of a centralized and closed economy. Most countries started engaging in globalization. As new technologies began to spread at a global level, the movement of goods, services, knowledge, people, and money started to increase across the borders. Although the increase in globalization challenges the role of a dominant state in the international
system as the state no longer holds the right to use legitimate force. However, in current time, gaining control over other territories and expanding influence no longer depends only on military deployments but also include considerations such as access to new resources and conquering foreign markets with the use of geo-economic weapons. (Gagné, 2007)

US-China War And The Use Of Geostrategy

After the Second World War, the international system was dominated by the US and its allies, which attempted to treat all the nations equally. However, the Chinese have always seen this as a world where the big dog gets the benefits. In this context, China wants Asia, including the Pacific Rim, to be dominated under China’s influence and not by the neutral rules that try to treat nations equally. China is working towards a “Neo-Tributary” approach to regional affairs according to which the political and economic fortune of every Asian country is influenced by the interests and preferences of China.

China has the leverage in any forthcoming fight or battle in the East or the South China Sea due to its geo-strategic location. China also claims sovereignty over these seas and the island formations in them. It is shown by the Nine Dash Line, which covers Taiwan and spread to the shores of Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia and also include waters legally claimed by Indonesia. China is trying to be a belligerent hegemon its near seas. China is also constructing artificial islands on the South China Sea where anti-ship and anti-air missiles can be deployed with the aim to deny other countries Freedom of Navigation. (Avuthu, 2017) China’s ambitions in the South China Sea has also led to the building of military and building construction in the South China Sea. It has also declared the Air-Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea to claim most part of the Sea (Denmark, 2018). China is also constructing artificial islands on the South China Sea where anti-ship and anti-air missiles can be deployed with the aim to deny other countries Freedom of Navigation. (Avuthu, 2017)

The effect of US-China trade war can be seen in Pakistan, whose financial condition is really poor. The conflict is about global dominance. If China succeeds, it can be on the path to becoming the new center for global trade. (Wall Street Journal, 2018)

One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative

The OBOR is an ambitious plan of China which is designed to reconnect places along China’s ancient Silk Road trade route. It is called “yidaiyilu” in Chinese. This project spans 3 continents and
touches over 60% of the world’s population. So far, over 60 countries have signed the agreement for these projects. On September 7, 2013, President Xi Jinping at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan mentioned the ancient silk road and gave the idea to build an economic belt along the Silk route. One month later, China and Indonesia decided to work on a maritime silk road for the 21st century. There is an overland Economic Belt of 6 corridors that serve as new routes to trade goods in and out of China. Some examples include a railroad connecting China to London, a gas pipeline from the Caspian Sea to China, a high-speed train network in South East Asia. The Maritime silk road is a chain of seaports stretching from the South China Sea to Africa. The project also includes oil refineries, industrial parks, power plants, mines, and fiber-optic networks—all designed to make it easier for the world to trade with China. Some examples include the Sinopec Refinery in Saudi Arabia, Minsk Industrial Park in Belarus, Vinh Tan 1 thermal power plant in Vietnam, Tavan Tolgoi coal deposit in Mongolia. China creates a win-win situation for everyone. It is no surprise that China has been signing this agreement mostly with Authoritarian and military governments like Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Thailand, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan. China willingly provides loan to unreliable countries who will unlikely be able to pay back the money because of corruption and conflicts. This provides China with strategic control in such countries. For example—China has strategic control over the port in Sri Lanka as a part of the 99-year lease, which is a key stop on the maritime silk road. China also has strategic control over the Gwadar Port in Pakistan as a part of their 40-year lease. China also opened a Chinese naval base in Djibouti. It’s the way for China to become the world’s next superpower. (Ellis, 2018)

China’s geo-strategy in Pakistan:

China invests in infrastructure in Pakistan. The friendship between the two countries brings tangible economic benefits. This falls under China’s Belt and Road Initiative. It aims to build up China’s Global Trade Network. President Xi Jinping started it in 2015. China plans to invest around 1 trillion $ on infrastructure projects in the next few years across 68 countries. China’s biggest belt and road project is taking place in Pakistan identified as the “China Pakistan Economic Corridor” (CPEC). China’s plan is to build Pakistan’s infrastructure on a large scale. After finishing, China can utilise these highways, ports, railways, and pipelines for efficient access to the entire Indian Ocean. China is also building hydro, wind and coal power plants in Pakistan. Nevertheless, as a part of the agreement, Pakistan has to buy the electricity produced at a price that covers a heavy return on investment and payback the debt too. Pakistan is already falling behind on payments. It essentially
Some implications of the One Belt One Road Initiative are:

**Chinese currency**
The usage and circulation of ‘Renminbi’ will increase globally and will lead to appreciation of the currency. (Fiano, 2018)

**Chinese construction companies**
As major OBOR projects would be undertaken by Chinese construction companies, it would reap massive benefits for the Chinese companies and the economy. (Frost Perspectives, 2017)

**China’s BRI is viewed as a threat in the US** –
The US still has the largest GDP in the world but China is gaining ground at a rapid pace. Until 2013, the US was the largest exporter of goods & services. China outperformed the US in the export of goods & services.

**China is giving huge loans to the countries it is investing in as a part of the BRI**
Some countries in which China is investing lots of money are not in a condition to pay back the money. For example – China funded the construction of a seaport in Sri Lanka in Hambantota, which Sri Lanka cannot afford to pay back on a 99-year lease. By loaning out money to Sri Lanka, China secured a port on a potentially strategic maritime trade route. It is also known as “debt-trap diplomacy”. (Diwakar, 2018)

**BRI will provide increased overseas access and presence of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).**
For example – China has set up its naval base in Djibouti, Africa. This provides geographical leverage to China all over the world.

**Conclusion**
Can the subtle play of geopolitics between US and China be referred to as the ‘New Cold-War’?

**Some historical instances of the US**
When communism was seen as a rising threat to the US, McCarthyism took the decision to contain the Soviet Union. After the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9th November 2011, the US decided to hunt down the terrorists and waged the ‘global war on terror’. US’s national wealth consists of its intellectual property and cutting-edge technology, which China deprives of. China is using legal and illegal means to acquire them, which is posing an internal threat to the US. (Mori, 2019)

If the US comes out to the top, it can strategically discourage China’s One Belt and Road initiative. Moreover, if China comes out to the top, it would be near to its goal of replacing the US and becoming the new center for global trade.

The US needs to shift its focus from the Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific Region, create a trade war against China, revitalize US relations with NATO countries, reposition focus from the Middle-East to the South China Sea and most importantly to get Australia, Japan, and India against the China’s One Belt and Road Initiative. The US intends to be the solitary world power. To prevent China from reaching the apex position in the international system, the US’s geo-strategy has to surpass
the geo-economics and containment has to be the last resort (Zahid, 2018). If the US wants to counter China in the Pacific and maintain a balance of power in the region, it should think of re-joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and also enhancing its broadcasting and information operations.

China strategically has a nuclear shield – with North Korea on the Eastern side and Pakistan on the Western side. Both North Korea and Pakistan are essential for China to achieve its ‘Chinese dream’ and the country’s ‘rejuvenation’. For China to counter the US, it must try to secure the ‘land silk roads’ by using ‘Westwards March’ strategy as the maritime routes in Indian and Pacific oceans are already under some control of US. (Zahid, 2018)

Although, there is no war or battle between the US and China. However, there is intangible warfare between the two countries to establish itself worldwide superpower. It is difficult to predict who will win this battle for global superpower as both countries have their set of strategies against each other.

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