

Recent relationship between the US and China seems to prey to Thucydides trap. Can America and China escape it? Analyse it keeping in view the recent trends in international politics.

THUCYDIDES: HISTORY OF THE P ELOPENNESIAN WAR

Thucydides was a ^{renowned} general and historian. He is often credited with being the first person to start the movement of 'scientific history'. He argued that history should be narrated from an objective lens and the narrators own biases should not affect the quality of his narrations.

He is also credited with writing the book 'History of the Peloponnesian war'. In which he narrated the events that brought Sparta and Athens to the brink and finally war. In his own words,

"It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable."

(Thucydides: ^{History of} Lesson of
the ^{lope} Pennessian war)

Athens was a power that had a land-army while Sparta was a naval power at that time. He argues that even though they were indirectly brought into war. They were bound to fight; as the rise of one threatens the dominance of the other.

GRAHAM ALLISON - THUCYDIDES TRAP

Graham T. Allison is renowned name in the realist circles of International relations. He coined the term 'Thucydides Trap'.

He implied that in a scenario where there is a hegemon present, they will always feel threatened when another state will try to rival it. This rivalry will create tensions that will eventually lead to war.

Nowadays, this model is used to explain the tensions between the US and China. China's meteoric rise has the US on edge in arms. The US's containment policy for China is a prime example. China's rise has caught the US off guard. As the Chairperson of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council ^{and his allies} said

"China's rise was so sudden... that we didn't have time to get astonished."

Graham argues that across the documented history in which Thucydides trap actually played majority of them resulted in a war. Moreover, of that majority that resulted in a war neither the rising nor ruling power initiated the conflict, but it ^{was} due to a third-party conflict.

This model presents a clear picture of the tensions between the ruling and rising powers and the dynamics of how other actors's actions lead to conflict between the two.

RECENT PROVOCATIONS / HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA

(a) Taiwan and the South China Sea - A major flashpoint

Taiwan, according to China's one-China policy, is a part of it. However, the Taiwanese government closely allied with the US likes to think otherwise. They did not trap perfectly plays it out here. As Taiwan's ever-increasing friendship with US clearly endangers China's ambitions.

This region is considered a major flashpoint between the two major super powers.

Moreover, China's expansionist policy of pursuing the Mao's 9-dash line has led to increased tension in area. The Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, and other countries all lay claim to the constellation of Island of which the Spratly Islands are a part of.

If a China's posturing in the region is concerned, it has portrayed itself as the dominant superpower of the region.

(b) Chip war and the new battle frontier of AI

China's rise is attributed to the vision of the current President, Xi Jinping. He charted the course for China's rise in the field of technology, Artificial Intelligence and much more. Even though to the dismay of the US, China has nearly caught up to the US. The embargo of

US chips to China did only little to stop its progress.

Moreover, as the world progresses the new battlefronts are in the cyber world. With a renowned hacking background and experience, Chinese hackers are quickly overcoming the gaps in US's cybersecurity front.

This is the primary reason why companies like Huawei, Xiaomi were banned in the US and other countries. These countries believe that these supply data back to China.

With more and more sanctions on the table, China has to ^{turn} itself and on its own crafted its chips and various technological tools.

c) US elections - Tougher Stance on China-US relations

As the "Diversionary stance of war" dictates that wars during elections are often used by leaders to divert their public's attention from their own performance.

However, in the US both sides have maintained an ever-increasing ^{tough} stance on China. With each one trying to out do the other: The former US President Donald Trump was the first one to impose tariffs on aluminium and steel. China, in turn, imposed tariffs on US-soybeans. This 'fit-for-tat' game has escalated into the present day scenario where the US has banned Chinese solar panels, EVs (Electric vehicles) citing uncompetitiveness due to China's oversupply in the market.

China has threatened to go to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) over these bans.

d) NATO's new pivot to Asia and China's Containment

NATO, a US lead ^{military} coalition, has reaffirmed its commitment to pivot to China in order to contain the rise of the country. In a recent press interview ^{at the NATO summit} in July of this year, NATO's Chief Jens Stoltenberg confirmed NATO's position and stance on China's rise. According to ^{AP news,} ~~the~~ ^{that} NATO was of the view that China's rise is a threat and in many ways the pivot to Asia ~~is~~ inevitable. In this regard, the bloc has reportedly started to engage with allied Pacific countries under the US's leadership.

NATO, one designed for countering Soviet expansion ^{ambitions}, is now being used to counter China's rising ~~dreams~~ ^{ambitions}. Japan and South Korea already play the tune of the US's concerns when it comes to China. Similarly, Australia and New Zealand have started ^{the} pottering in line with ^{the} American's.

e) China-Russia De-Facto Alliance

With Russia's war in Ukraine, the country grows closer to the Chinese, with both pledging to a mutual defence treaty in this year. Moreover, the West i.e. the US and Europe have now been irked by China's unwavering support to the Russians in the Ukraine war. As the popular saying goes 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend,' it looks like the two countries have taken this to heart and enhanced their cooperation in the field of technology, defence, economy and so on.

China, in some ways according to

is fuelling Russia's 'war-machine'.

IS THE US-CHINA WAR INEVITABLE OR CAN IT BE AVOIDED?

Thucydides Trap is a realist theory. Realism is grounded on the fact that conflict and war are two realities that no country can escape. In a structure where no international sovereign exists, every country must fend for themselves.

That is what the Chinese have done for the last 70 years and above. It is only back in 2013 since Xi Jinping took over that China has started to assert itself on the global stage. The economic policy of China and the ^{resulting} rising growth has pushed it ever closer rival the US in economic terms. At present the difference in both countries GDP is close to USD 8 Trillion. A stark reminder of the sheer determination and commitment the country has.

'The coming war on China' is a documentary by famous ^{Australian} ~~British~~ journalist John Pilger and highlights the growing number of US military bases surrounding China. As realism would dictate, the course of action on part of the Chinese would be to adopt 'defensive realism'. Countering the US alone would be futile as the economy might be on the Chinese side, however their military is still lacking.

In this regard, China has recently spent heavily on modernising its armed forces. With investments in naval forces, Chinese naval capacity

has overtaken the US's capacity.

In this day and age, war is ^a costly business. The US has proved this when it fought a war of attrition in Afghanistan, it spent USD 20 Trillion and left Afghanistan in ~~left~~ state of decay. The Chinese know this and work opposite to what the US follows. They employ soft power tools and use methods that Joseph Nye's analysis complements.

The Chinese would want to avoid to war as long as it is possible, while building their capacity to fight one if necessary.

"Common Sense - A way for Countries to escape the Thucydides Trap" - Graham Allison

The way forward that Graham Allison proposes is countries ^{need to} think rationally and use common sense. China, in this regard, has always maintained a dovish approach. By advocating for mutual dialogue and cooperation.

True, liberal internationalism does foresee the long-lasting benefits and life of cooperation through dialogue; but it fails to recognize the fact that if one party views the other as an aggressor, no amount of dialogue would help.

In this regard, the structures and interactions need to ^{be} revisited and fresh measures build confidence among both partners is needed. Trade tariffs need to be reviewed and policy of protectionism only hurt the overall cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

—A— The Thucydides trap is an inevitable part of the great ^{power} game between 2 major powers. The US-China are locked in a bitter battle to ~~attain~~ establish their dominance; with China as the rising power and the US adamant on maintaining the status quo. The recent provocations from both have helped to exacerbate the situation. However, for the Chinese war is an option that they do not wish to pursue. In this regard, dialogue and cooperation seem to be the only way to resolve and escape from this situation. A mutual benefit that enables all players to win.

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