

# Implications of USA-China Clashing Interests in The Asia Pacific Region on International Peace and Security: Reflections of The South China Sea Dispute from 2012 to 2022.

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**Abstract:** Asia Pacific region has become a region of strategic importance for both the United States of America (USA) and People's Republic of China. As a result renewed interests have emerged. Both countries are actively competing for natural resources especially oil, for political and tactical influence as well as to ensure they expand their interests. These increased interests have reduced the Asia Pacific region to become a battleground for power and influence hence negatively affecting the presence of peace and security. This current situation has disposed the Asia Pacific region to become a center-piece for rivalry and is a region at risk of great power competition. Tensions between the US and China have created conditions of aggressive, assertive and revisionist tendencies. This has generated insecurities among countries in the Asia Pacific region. The South China Sea now presents an arena in which the US and China can show-case their power. The South China Sea is moving from being a marginal area to become the epicenter of US-China relations, this might affect peace and security in the region because these two major powers are prepared to go to war so as to safeguard their interests in the South China Sea. This paper provides an analysis of the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region on peace and security. The article examined the case of the South China Sea Dispute. This paper recommends that the US and China should locate areas of mutual interests and focus on collective interests which assures a peaceful and secure Asia Pacific region. The US and China should manage their relations with focus of creating a stable and conducive Asia Pacific region, through mutual respect and understanding.

**Key words:** United States of America (USA), China, Asia-Pacific Sea, International peace and security.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War in 1989 ushered in a new dispensation in global architecture, the United States of America (USA) emerged as a sole power status within the bracket of a unipolar moment in the international system. The new epoch which unfolded following the fall of the Berlin Wall provided the USA with an opportunity to shape the international system according to its preferences and values. Against such a backdrop of being a global hegemon, the USA expanded and advanced its interests in many regions including the Asia Pacific region. However by early 2000, USA supremacy started to be questioned and there was emergence of academic analysis about the end of the USA unipolar

moment. Layne (2006: 41-42) states that “there is a paradox between the magnitude of American power and Washington’s inability to use that power to always get what it wants in international politics... hegemony is not omnipotence”. It is worth to note that since the year 2000, “China’s renewed interests became one of the most striking phenomena in international relations” (Glaser 2011: 85). Yet, “there remains an equally striking lack of consensus about the implications of China’s renewed interests vis a vis US interests” (Mearsheimer 2005: 139). One of the most dominant debate in international relations literature dwells on different interpretations of whether China will seek to challenge the United States of America and dominate Asian regional politics.

### *Background to the Asia-Pacific Crisis*

The Asia Pacific region is experiencing a struggle for mastery, contest for supremacy and power. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Friedberg (1994: 5) postulated that “the Asia Pacific region is ripe for rivalry and at risk of intensifying military competition”. This state of affairs has been the new face of the 21<sup>st</sup> century political architecture of the Asia Pacific region. At the center of the problem is the dominant view that China is overtaking the USA in terms of economic power. Indeed, Zhao (2016: 15) stated that, “China is growing at a considerably faster rate than the United States”. This is a problem because from a security point of view the US-China relationship presents a clash of a dissatisfied hegemony in the name of the USA and a dissatisfied rising power in the name of China. The power distribution in the Asia Pacific region between the USA and China will provide a possibility of a tense military conflict which is a threat to regional peace and security.

Friedman (2013: 225) argues that “the rise of an ambitious world power, China, changes the global distribution of power and redefines national interests”. Having an impressive economic growth, China sets to challenge from the political and strategic subordination of the United States of America (USA) here in after mentioned as United States (US) which has been maintaining the pattern and understanding of the global order after the Cold War (Anam 2014). Therefore,

“facing this new challenge, the United States aims to preserve its sphere of influence. It has reformed her defense strategy and is concentrating its resources throughout the Asia Pacific region” (Prantl 2012: 4). This fact shows that the rise of China and its redefinition of interests have brought current order into a new pattern of power relations and it could trigger, what Mearsheimer (2005) contends as an ‘intense security competition’ with considerable potential for war, that is mainly caused by great power rivalry between China and the United States (US). Therefore, it is likely to be a threat to peace, security and regional stability, as observed by White (2008) that war in the Asia Pacific region remains thinkable. The researchers discovered that the South China Sea is a hotbed of conflict between six parties, with three of them being the main pivots that is Vietnam, the Philippines and China. Against such a background this article analyses the implications of USA-China interests in the Asia Pacific region on peace and security, with special focus on the South China Sea dispute from the period 2012 to 2022.

## II. CONCEPTUALISATION OF PEACE AND SECURITY

There is no agreement on the precise definition of the concept security, it has been defined differently and sometimes it has lost its meaning due to the fact that it has been overdeveloped. Dalby (1997: 6) argues that “security has many meanings, some of which are not necessarily logically linked to conventional understandings, the term security is ambiguous in content as well as in format and it refers to different sets of issues and values”. These researchers are of the view that the term security has presented a lot of confusion with multiplicity of meanings. In the 1950’s during the Cold War period, Wolfers (1952: 483) has characterized national security as an “ambiguous symbol which if used without specifications, leaves room for more confusion than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford”. It is pertinent to note that “security studies as a field suffers from absenteeism of a mutual understanding of what security is, how it can be conceptualized, and what its most relevant research questions are” (Haftendorn 1991: 15). The debate on trying to understand the concept security has spanned for decades in the academic and military circles.

According to Buzan (1991: 1) “the concept of security is, in much of its prevailing usage, so weakly developed as to be inadequate for the task”. However, Garnett (1996: 12) argues that “security has actually become an overdeveloped concept, so wide in its scope that it is in danger of being emptied of meaning”. However, although there are warnings in an attempt to define security, authors have defined the concept.

Just like security the term peace has been problematic to define and defined differently by many scholars. Mhandara and Chipaike (2013: 212) state that “the concept of peace is value-laden and lacks precise meaning”. Indeed, there is multiplicity of meanings of peace. “. Generally, peace is assumed to be the absence of war that is negative peace (Galtung 1996). Its broader meaning relates to the absence of

structural and originating violence that is positive peace (Galtung 1996).

## III. USA-CHINA OVERLAPPING INTERESTS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

The USA and China have considerable interests in the Asia Pacific, however these interests are different as will be analysed below. Breslin (2009: 817) states that “in an era when everything relating to change in China can be described as remarkable or dramatic, it is perhaps not surprising that Chinese perceptions of, and policy towards, the Asia Pacific region have undergone radical transformations”. According to Kamrul (2013: 123) “US strategic calculations in East Asia and its business company’s interests in the South China Sea have attracted the US to be involved in the Asia Pacific region, though the US has no territorial claims in the South China Sea”. Therefore this article maintains that the US has regularly rebalanced and adjusted its involvement in the Asia Pacific region hence creating a power vacuum. Thus, “China built its policy in the Asia Pacific region basing on mistrust and suspicion, seeing most Asian states largely as agents of American foreign policy, and the USA policy largely as designed to prevent China’s rise” (Breslin 2009: 817). Therefore the clash of interests between the US and China proved to be highly complicated.

This article is of the view that competition for exploration and exploitation of vast oil resources in the Asia Pacific region have created an allegory situation of two people in the same bed with different dreams. Therefore, “China and the US have interests that are mainly confrontational and conflicting” (Xuetong 2010: 292). The US interests in the Asia-Pacific region is multifaceted. The US is rhetorically argued to be concerned about promoting regional stability, fostering democracy and human rights, encouraging economic prosperity, furthering cooperation on fighting transnational issues and international crime, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Baines 2017). On the other hand, Swaine (2012: 24) states that “China’s core interests are centered on the question to resolve China’s sovereignty and territorial claims that it deems important enough to go to war over especially nonnegotiable matters”. Territorial claims in the South and East China Seas have acquired status of core interests for China. Yang (2010: 291) argues that “the instability of China-US relations since the end of the Cold War is mainly attributable to their fewer mutually favourable interests than unfavourable ones”. This article is of the view that China’s interests in the World and ambitions will continue to grow as its power continues to grow. If history is a reliable guide, China’s appetites will grow as its power grows, and China will seek to shape its international environment in ways congenial to its interests.

However, Shinn and Eisenman (2008: 6) argue that “American and Chinese interests in the Asia Pacific are different but not substantially so, since there are more areas where the two countries can cooperate for the benefit of peace, stability and security in the Asia Pacific than there are

issues of disagreement and competition”. of course there are also areas of mutual interests between the US and China in the Asia Pacific and they are also elements of disagreements. Art (2010: 390) postulates that “bonds between the United States and China stem from shared economic, security, and political interests, however tensions between the United States and China arise from differences in and conflicts about economic, political, and security interests”. This article is unique on the fact that it clearly highlights that there are more tensions and differences between US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region which has resulted to suspicion and conflict situations between the US and China. This view has been silent in reviewed literature.

#### IV. REVISITING REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

A revisit of the situation in the Asia Pacific since it presents both opportunities for peace and security and also the growing sense of insecurities. Friedberg (1994: 5) argued that “the Asia Pacific region is ripe for rivalry and at risk of intensifying military competition”. This means that the Asia Pacific region is likely to suffer from the US-China clash of interests, indeed the Asia Pacific region is heading to become a volatile region with insecurities, conflict, and a possibility of war, arms race, security dilemma and great power competition. Friedberg (1994: 5) stated that “in the past, numerous cases of emerging rising powers and rivalries between major powers created conditions for arms races which stimulated both hot or cold wars that were devastating for regional and international peace and security”. The US-China clash of interests could be disastrous for the region and impose catastrophic costs on regional peace marked by widespread uncertainties and insecurities about the future.

Political frictions and mistrust among major actors in the Asia Pacific region is exacerbating security issues. To make matters worse, Liff and Ikenberry (2011: 53) states that “long-standing disputes over maritime boundaries and territorial claims worsen the situation in the Asia Pacific region”. At the center of the drama in the Asia Pacific region is the rise of China and its renewed core interests and the US Pivot to Asia, indeed this study maintains that the divergence of interests between the US and China in the Asia Pacific region is likely to compromise regional peace and security. This is because a vicious, unavoidable, and tragic action-reaction cycle is born. Given the apparently increasing volatility of the contemporary Asia Pacific region, a key question for this article is whether states in the Asia Pacific region are likely to suffer due to conflicts of interests between the US, China and other players in the region? or is there any possibility of insecurities and presence of conflict which inevitably lock the US and China in a web of escalating hostility and arms competition? This article answers that the situation in Asia Pacific Region create a complex dynamic of insecurity and ever presence of conflict which exacerbate an existing, destabilizing spiral.

Regional peace and security in the Asia Pacific is highly compromising and complicated. Mathews (2017: 42) argue

that “Beijing’s growing military power, coupled with its rapidly expanding military capabilities and recent policies vis-à-vis disputed territory questions appear provocative and newly assertive even aggressive”. The situation in the Asia Pacific region reflects Cold War relics. The situation in the Asia Pacific is a reflection of New Cold War and the revival of Cold War mentality hence compromising the everlasting peace and security in the Asia Pacific region. According to Klaus (2017: 6) “the United States in particular, has cultivated a multinational, multifaceted confrontation in the South China Sea for this very purpose, attempting to pit nations like Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and even nations removed from the sea, all against China”. Minor, isolated disputes that could otherwise be resolved through bilateral relations directly with Beijing, have now been consolidated into a larger and growing confrontation prodded forward by the involvement of the United States, its military forces and its attempts to involve international institutions (Mathews 2017). By doing so, Asia is being destabilised.

However, Chan (2004: 105) observes that “the United States and China are share collective interests for peace and security in the Asia Pacific Ring”. This means that both China and the US crave for a continuing peaceful and secure environment in the Asia Pacific region. Wang (2015: 35) states that “China wants to avoid any chaos and loss of control, any major disruption, such as a war, could put a halt to the current process of reform and structural change”. On the other hand, Breslin and Klaus (2017: 4) posits that “the United States has broad commitments and strong interests in a peaceful and stable Asian continent”. However, these researchers are of the view that at the center of the debate of US-China clash of interests is whether the Asian Pacific region is affected in terms of peace and security. Indeed, this article is of the position that the Asia Pacific region has been reduced to become a volatile region and a hot bed of conflict.

#### V. THE IMPACTS OF US-CHINA INTERESTS ON REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region has created condition of competition for primacy which will result in a conflict and outright war. If truth is anything to go by US-China interests are based on power projections, and hard power is going to be used to safe guard these interests hence insecurity, conflict and war is now a recurrent feature in the Asia Pacific region. According to Zhang (2016: 6) “frictions between Asian Pacific countries in hotspots such as the South China Sea and East China Sea dispute, the Korean Peninsula, and the Taiwan issue are undoubtedly posing a threat to the Asia-Pacific region at large”. Moreover, “the US commitment to its security alliance with Japan, Indonesia, and Taiwan has increased concerns that mounting friction between China and its neighbours could have global implications on peace and security”. White (2008) states that war in the Asia Pacific region remains thinkable. This article maintains that the implications of US-China interests has reduced the Asia Pacific region to be a conflict ridden region. This means that

countries in the Asia Pacific region are living in the shadow of war, thus prospects of peace and security are handicapped.

The US and China have conflicting interests in the Asia Pacific region and are in an extreme competition with considerable effect on peace and security. These authors have seen that there is minimum peace and security in the Asia Pacific region since it has been reduced to become a volatile region full of uncertainties. Indeed the Asia Pacific region provides a theatre for a China which is seeking to shift the US primacy in the region by expanding its power and influence and become a regional hegemonic power. This is a threat to peace and security because, “the US and China now have nuclear weapons and capabilities however currently, the US arsenal guarantees the destruction of China under possible circumstances, while China still has a minimum deterrent” (Zhao 2016: 145). At some point in the future, however, “China will achieve a Mutual Assured Destruction level equivalent with the United State, when that happens, the conditions for a potential confrontation will re-emerge” (Ibid: 45). This situation has created a probability of an arms race which is a jeopardy to regional peace and security. This fact has not escaped the attention of these researcher, therefore the implications of US-China clash of interests is that as the Chinese power keep on growing it is going to challenge the Washington establishment and replace it with Beijing consensus hence the reinvention of past disputes and creation of conditions of a heated conflict.

Continuous clash of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region is causing nascent competition and emerging security dilemma. Given the nature of the international system, cooperation seems difficult hence the Asia Pacific region is degenerating into a conflict zone. According to Jervis (1978: 167), “security dilemmas are situations in which two great powers have defensive, or status quo, intentions and would most probably prefer to avoid costly and devastating competition and mutual arming”. Despite such compelling arguments by Jervis (1978), Liff and Ikenberry (2011: 53) argue that “because of insecurity coupled with uncertainty about the other’s intentions, each side clearly concludes that it has no alternative”. This is a dangerous negative implication on regional peace and security because the result of the US-China clash in the Asia Pacific region is a “costly and potentially disastrous action-reaction sequence that could be mitigated if only both sides will be able to engage in more credible restraint and signal their defensive intentions and would prefer to avoid costly and destabilising competition and mutual arming” (Liff and Ikenberry 2014: 53). This study maintains that Asian Pacific regional peace and security is at stake because of great power politics and various hot spots and flash points such as the South China Sea are now used for proxy wars which has spillover effects on regional level. This means that the Asia Pacific region is now far to see any ‘peace dividend’.

The US is committed for promotion of peace, security and stability in the Asia Pacific region. Indeed the US interests in

the Asia Pacific region requires peace and security. This is the case for China its peaceful rise requires a peaceful approach. Therefore China will make sure that the Asia Pacific region is peaceful and secure so as to realize its goal of being a global economic power house. According to Tang (2016: 8) “China and the US will benefit more in a secure and peaceful Asia than in a volatile region thus their interests will not cause destabilisation of the region”. However, the reality on ground is that the Asia Pacific region is experiencing a struggle for mastery, contest for supremacy and power. This means that conflict, tensions and skirmishes are now recurrent words in the vocabulary of the Asia Pacific region.

## VI. UNCLEAR FUTURE US-CHINA RELATIONS

The US-China relationship is becoming increasingly complex and interdependent, and leaders in Beijing and Washington are struggling to establish a common foundation to expand and deepen bilateral relations. Tanner and Dong (2016: 12) state that “while China and the US seem to partially agree on the broad consensus and need to cooperate and to manage intense competition, the facts of how to move the relationship forward in a positive way remain unclear”. This article maintains that events in the Asia Pacific region reflects a mixture of both conflict and cooperation. Indeed, Tanner and Dong (2016: 12) posit that “the Asia-Pacific region remains one of the areas of greatest potential for cooperation between the United States and China and it is also a realm of greatest potential for conflict between the two powers”. Qi (2017: 2) postulates that “almost all the potential hot spots or crisis points between the US and China are in the South China Sea”. However, “at this point, scholars and political analysts lack the kind of powerful predictive tools that would allow them to say with any degree of assurance what the state of relations between the US and China will be in five years’ time or to say anything for ten to twenty years to come” (Friedberg 2005: 8). This means that it is difficult to predict with certainty about the future of the US and China. Since the international system is not static, predictions are prone to ever changing dynamics in the international system.

It is important to note that, “although it is not easy to predict whether or not the rivalry of great powers will likely bring the Asia-Pacific region into a major war, it might at least be said that if the potential of that war has emerged it would risk regional peace and security” (Anam 2014: 128). Allison (2017: 17), concludes that “as far ahead and appropriate as the eye can see, the most defining question about global politics and order is whether China and the United States can manage to escape the Thucydides’ Trap.” According to Xueting (2016: 45) “the rise of a new power has been attended by uncertainties and anxieties”. This article maintains that often, though not always, violent conflict has followed after the rise of a new power. Glaser and Sun (2015: 83) posit that “unfolding events in Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea present hot button issues for the US and China and it remains unclear these issues can be solved through dialogue”. Anam (2014: 130) postulates that “the rise of China, although to some extent seems peacefully, it reflects

the ambition of China to replace the supremacy of the US throughout the region”. Therefore, Mearsheimer (2014) states that China cannot rise peacefully and predicted that there is a reasonable chance that the US and China will end up in a shooting war over the next thirty or forty years.

This article agrees with Mearsheimer (2014) on the basis that the future relationship between the US and China is likely to be marred by an outright war. This article predicts that by 2050 the South China Sea scenario is likely to spark a war, the situation is highly complicated but basing on what these researchers call the ‘push-pull model’ the US and China are sliding into a war trap which is inescapable. In simple terms, this article develops the push-pull model in explaining relations among states in the international system and is based on the premises that competing states are pushed to an edge of waging war because of divergence in terms of preferences, interests and values. This will pull all states which are allies of the competing states therefore creating a vicious circle of outright war which will spread in other regions. Basing on the push-pull model the US and China are likely to be locked in a deadly conflict or what this article dubbed the Sea War of the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. The future of US-China relations is based on human error and miscalculation. This study maintains that the outcomes of the US-China clash in the Asia Pacific region more profoundly affect regional peace and security in the Asia Pacific region thus with the proximity of China it will try to avoid a conflict since it will suffer more. In this case, this study focuses on what these researchers call the proximity-effect model of analysis. In summary the proximity-model of analysis is premised on the fact that a certain country with competing interests with other countries in a certain region or continent follow a peaceful path if there is a propinquity distance.

However, this article maintains that the future of US-China relations in the Asia Pacific is still shrouded in obscurity and it is pertinent for both China and the US to face the power reality. According to Smith (2017: 45) “the Chinese ultimately have to come to the power reality, while it is increasingly difficult for the US to maintain primacy, China cannot be the single power of domination in the region either”. On the other hand, Brzezinski (2012: 98) argues that, “the United States should recognize that stability in Asia can no longer be imposed by a non-Asian power”. This study maintains that the power reality in the Asia Pacific Asia region is so complicated to the extent that a peaceful future is so bleak. Commenting from offensive realist school of thought, this study is of the view that China has become an expansionist and revisionist military power, bullying its neighbors hence creation of alliances and bandwagoning has been the order of the day thus conflict in the Asia Pacific region between the US-China remains a possibility. According to Smith (2017: 46) “strategic mistrust is unavoidable because the US-China relationship has always been characterized by numerous points of friction that no amount of sophisticated and great diplomacy can easily solve”. The China-US rivalry is sliding into a new Cold War, which, Mearsheimer (2001) cautioned

that it would be more dangerous than the previous American-Soviet Cold War. The Asia-Pacific would thus “become one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the twenty-first century” (Zhao 2015: 39). Therefore the Asia Pacific region is being negatively affected on peace and security by US-China interests.

Ample evidence suggests that the US is preparing a long cold war with China (Zhou 2011). Mearsheimer (2014) argues that conflict between the US and China will be very hard to avoid. This article is of the position that the South China Sea dispute reflects an area of conflict, confrontation and competition at the highest stage, a scenario likely to create a new dispensation of Cold War politics. Xueting (2010: 290) argues that “the rise of China as an economic power house has a great probability to cause intense security competition between China and the US with a considerable potential for war”. Xueting (2010) further argues that the US is likely to behave in an aggressive way thus escalating prospects of trouble in the Asia Pacific. In short, this article presents a pessimistic view that the US-China relationship is destined for war.

## VII. DIFFERENT THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AT PLAY

The current situation in the Asia Pacific has been analysed using different theories. This article uses classical realism, offensive realism, commercial liberalism and power transition theory in explaining the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region on peace and security.

### *Classical Realism*

Sorensen (2014: 305) states that “classical realism is a theory of international relations established in the post-World War II era that seeks to explain international politics as a result of human nature”. Major proponents of classical realism are Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Niebuhr and E.H. Carr. Crawford (2015: 54) states that “humans are assumed to be naturally aggressive, power-seeking, fearful, and rational”. In short, the description of humans resembles a template of the description of states in the international system, states just like human beings are aggressive, selfish, ruthless, power-seeking, fearful, and rational actors. Morgenthau (1985: 319) posits that “the first principle of political realism is that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature, the operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure”. The situation in the Asia Pacific is a strong semblance of the selfish nature of states which are tangled on a crossroad in the South and East China Sea dispute and Taiwan issue. More specifically the clash of interests between China and the US are centered on the intrinsic selfish nature among state which generates conflicting interests.

Morgenthau (1985: 320) posits that “states have an insatiable appetite for power that is a limitless lust for power”. The US and China are locked in a battle field for power and control.

White and Smith (2016: 34) postulate that “the US Pivot to Asia is bent on the fact of dominance and re-configuration of power in the Asian Pacific region”. Carr (1939: 1) argues that “states like human beings, have an innate desire to dominate others which lead them to fight wars, in this respect state power is an end in itself”. Therefore, Morgenthau (1985: 320) saw “politics as a continuous struggle for power among nations”. The US-China clash in the Asia Pacific region clearly reflects the innate desire by the US and China to dominate the Asia Pacific region hence probability of the Thucydides Trap as observed by Friedberg (1994: 5) that “the Asia Pacific region is ripe for rivalry and at risk of intensifying military competition”.

Analysing the current scenario in the Asia Pacific region from classical realism lens, this article maintains that the US-China clash of interests in the Asia Pacific region will result to negative implications on peace and security since the US and China will continuously engage in a struggle to increase capabilities and power. Therefore, Spirtas (1996: 387) states that “for classical realists international politics is evil and bad things happen because the people making foreign policies are bad”. Underscored from Spirtas (1996) observation is the fact that international relations is an evil business, and relations occur in a jungle of vulture hungry political entrepreneurs with appetite of war, bloodshed and conflict. Art (2010: 360) observes that “there will be political and economic conflicts and friction between the United States and China”. This article agrees with Art (2010) on the basis that the US and China are heading to a deadly conflict in the Asia Pacific region triggered by the involvement of both these super powers in the South and East China Sea Dispute. However one of the weakness of classical realism is that they provided a one sided view of human being as bad ignoring the good side of human being.

### *Offensive Realism*

Offensive realism also provides theoretical foundations for an analysis of the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region on peace and security. Major proponent of offensive realism is Mearsheimer. This article maintains that calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them. Mearsheimer (2001: 6) observes that “power is the currency of great power politics and states compete for it among themselves, what money is to economics, power is to international relations”. Mearsheimer (2001: 8) postulates that “a state’s ultimate goal is to be a hegemon in the system”. The current situation in the Asia Pacific region clearly shows that the ultimate goal of China is to become a regional hegemony and replacing the US as a vibrant power in the region.

In the same vein, the ideal situation in the Asia Pacific region reflects China’s quest to be a regional hegemon and to stretch to other regions and continents as its power grows. Mearsheimer (2001: 6) posits that “states look for opportunities and chances to alter the balance of power by gaining supplementary power at the expense of potential

rivals”. The situation in the Asia Pacific region falls within the bracket of offensive realism in which the US is trying at its best to increase its grip and power in the region. The situation create a win-lose political gamble between the US and China in a zero sum political game. This article maintains that the trick in a zero-sum political gamble is to be the winner in great power competition and to dominate other states in the system. Thus, Mearsheimer (2001: 22) argues that “states think offensively and aggressively toward other states”. This research of the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region clearly shows that the pursuit and constant struggle for power is likely to stop when one state between the US and China become a hegemony, it is a trick political question since there is need to be a winner and loser in these two great power. The situation therefore create a tale of a death race in which the winner and the survivor will enjoy the spoils of the competition. The Asia Pacific region more specifically the disputes in the South China Sea is likely to turn the colourless water into a sea of blood. In simple terms, the aggressive intentions in the Asia Pacific region is likely to reduce the region to become a magnetic force of attracting conflict which will be internationalised and become an outright 21st century War.

This article utilised the bedrock assumptions of offensive realism, however the study picks some assumptions which are critical to the topic under study. The first assumption is that “great powers inherently possess great degree offensive military capability, which gives them the ability to hurt and possibly destroy each other” (Mearsheimer 2001: 25). In simple terms, Mearsheimer (2001: 26) postulates that “states are possibly dangerous to each other”. This best explains the situation in the Asia Pacific region, a vicious cycle and a web of dangerous intentions has become a common place between China, the US and its allies in the Asia Pacific Region. A mixture of hurting and uncertain intentions create a complicated scenario in international politics and has locked the Asia Pacific region in a crossroad in which a wrong turn is full of insecurities, instability and minimum peace.

This research picks the assumption of offensive realism which states that survival is the primary goal of great powers. Specifically, Mearsheimer (2001) argues that states seek to maintain their independence and territorial integrity. It is important to note that survival is important since it dominates other motives and priorities, because once a state is conquered, it is unlikely to be in a great position to pursue other associated aims. According to Swaine (2012: 24) “China’s core interests include, preserving the political system, national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity especially in East China Sea territorial dispute, preventing the separation of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, and Chinese focus on sustainable economic development”. The current state of the situation in the Asia Pacific region portrays a mixture of mistrust, suspicion, and constant fear for each other and the ultimate goal is survival. These authors maintains that there is little room for trust among states in the Asia Pacific region thus conflict will be inevitable.

However, Kirshner (2010: 7) argues that “bidding for hegemony rather than having hegemon is a dangerous occupation and has historically proven to be ‘one of the few and rare paths to destruction for a great power’”. Kirshner (2010: 8) further notes that “apart from the US, states that have bid for hegemony have not succeeded for instance Wilhelmine Germany and imperial Japan”. The reasoning by Kirshner (2010) is valid on the basis that since states are rational actors moved by rational calculus are unlikely to act following failed path experienced by other states. Kirshner (2010: 10) states that “if China follow the offensive realist logic, then one can assume that while operating on rationalist premises, it has learnt nothing from history”. Although, Kirshner’s arguments sounds more rationalistic, this study maintains that the offensive realist logic is a powerful tool of analysis of the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific since the issue at hand reflects a power struggle, the quests for hegemony, massive offensive mentality at the heart of assertive, aggressive foreign policies.

The importance of the use of offensive realism in this article lie on the fact that it unpacks and create powerful incentives on how great powers think and act offensively with regard to each other. The predictions and descriptions of offensive realism best explains the current situation in the Asia Pacific region. Mearsheimer (2013) observes that conflict between the US and China will be very hard to avoid. These researchers agrees with the offensive realism in terms of predictions and the prognosis of the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region.

#### *Commercial Liberalism*

This study also utilised commercial liberalism which focuses on the benefits of commerce. Moravicsik (2001: 14) focuses on “incentives created by opportunities for trans-border economic transactions”. The liberal trade doctrine held that trade among states like trade among individuals was mutually beneficial all states would gain through participation in a global division of labour. This theory is closely linked with globalisation and the interconnectedness of states which then makes states to interdepend on each other. Drawing from the above assumptions one might conclude that the US and China need each other in the long run thus confrontation, war and isolation is not an answer to their relationship in the global village. Rejecting the view of international politics as a jungle, “commercial liberalism see world politics as a cultivable garden, which combines a state of war with the possibility of a state of peace” (Moravicsik 2001: 24). Thus economic development and trade incentives brought cooperation of states into play hence the future of US and China in the Asia Pacific region will be largely of cooperation because of economic development and shared interests of peace.

Friedman (2010: 4) states that “politics is no longer the driving force of change, it is now economics”. Politics have become less and less important, economics and the free market, are now catalysts for social change and political initiative both good and bad (Moravicsik 2001). In the same

vein Friedman (2010: 10) explains that “it is information and technology which are the most effective tools for survival in the post-Cold War era and those who are the fastest, or fittest, states in terms of technology will be the ones who, not only survive, but prosper, in the new age of globalization”. Basing on the above observation by Friedman (1996) globalisation is therefore a peace producer, thus the implications of US-China interests in the Asia Pacific region is likely to create positive incentives for peace and security. In addition Friedman (2010: 10) states that “when a country has reached an economic development where it has a middle class strong enough to support a McDonald’s network, it would become a McDonald’s country and will not be interested in fighting wars anymore”. Friedman (2010) maintains that no two countries that both had McDonald’s had fought a war against each other since each got its McDonald’s. The situation in the Asia Pacific region reflects that the Chinese are not willing to create conflict situations since it will halt its peaceful rise and economic development. Regardless of whether the observation by Friedman (2010) is true, the conclusions to be drawn are unclear since they are also cases in which globalisation also creates situations of conflict.

#### *Power Transition Theory*

The US-China clash in the Asia Pacific region can be analysed using the power transition theory. Major proponents of power transition theory include Organski, Kugler, Lemke and Tammen. Major assumptions of power transition theory revolve on the issues of hierarchy, economic growth, dissatisfaction, overtaking, and parity (Tammen et al 2000). Organski (1958) first formulated power transition theory and predicted the potential rise of China and its impact on the international security order. Organski (1968: 338) explained the dynamics of “the potential power transition war between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a rising challenger and the United States as a declining hegemon in the international system”. According to Zakaria (2009: 45) “when a new power rises it inevitably disturbs the balance of power. This is because the international system is viewed as a pyramid-shaped power hierarchy”. The current situation in the Asia Pacific reflects a rising challenger in the name of China which has renewed interests hence changing the dynamics of regional security order.

The US-China clash reflects a shift of power in the Asia Pacific region since China has gained more grip as a regional hegemony and is now using its power to solve ancient problems such as the South China Sea territorial dispute. According to Tammen et al (2000: 32) “the greatest risk of conflict is when the two competing states have reached rough equality in power parity”. Contextualising the US-China clash from the observation by Tammen et al (2000) is the fact that there are elements of overtaking and creation of a dangerous zone of power transition therefore the Asia Pacific region is heading for conflict, war and insecurity, this conflict scenario has instigated the rationale of this research. Power transition theory offers important predictive tools to the understanding of the future US-China relations in the Asia Pacific region.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above the Asia Pacific region is disposed for rivalry and at risk of great power competition. Tensions between the US and China has created conditions of aggressive, assertive and revisionist tendencies which has generated insecurities among countries in the Asia Pacific region. This article concludes that offensive realism is at play in the Asia Pacific region and there is also evidence of power transition in the Asia Pacific Region hence creating dangerous conditions of arms race and security dilemma hence posing threat to negative peace and security. From a classical realist perspective war in the Asia Pacific is a present reality and the region represents a war torn area. The research comes to a conclusion that conflict, confrontation, insecurities and intense military conditions created by US-China interests has caused Asian Pacific countries to be living in the shadow of war. The South China Sea presents an area in which the US and China can show case their power hence the South China Sea is moving from being a marginal area to become the epicenter of US-China relations as dictated by power transition theory.

## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that the US and China should locate areas of mutual interests and focus on collective interests which assures a peaceful and secure Asia Pacific region. The US and China should manage their relations basing on consideration of creating a stable and conducive Asia Pacific region. The fact that the Asia Pacific region is now the fulcrum of world affairs it should benefit more from US-China involvement in the region.

This study recommends that in order to avert conflict over the South China Sea, claimants should come together and establish solutions to the dispute on their own and avoid to internationalise the dispute. In simple terms this study recommends that the US should stay away from the South China Sea dispute this solution avoid conflict between the US and China since China will solve the dispute with its neighbours. Although this study used classical realism and offensive realism as part of the underpinning theories at play, the researcher also used commercial liberalism to analyse the topic understudy thus basing on tenets of commercial liberalism the US should stay away from the South China Sea since it is a McDonalds country which will not opt for conflict or war thus if the US avoid to be involved in the issue, the settlement of the dispute might come by. The study is of the view that Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC) can play a major role in solving the South China Sea dispute. This is because, the APEC and ASEAN are failing to solve the long standing territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the escalation of the dispute is now posing threat to regional peace and security. This study recommends that APEC and ASEAN should engage contestants in the South China Sea to solve the dispute based on multilateralism.

This study also recommends that the US and China should avoid to be trapped into the Thucydides trap by focusing on finding ground for cooperation and coexistence. China should reassure the US that its renewed interests will work hand in hand with the US interests in the Asia Pacific region on the other hand the US should reassure China that it will not attempt to suppress China's interests. This study recommends that the US and China should create trust, clarity and maturity so as to have a peaceful future. Basing on the South China Sea, the US should respect Chinese sovereignty and let China and its neighbours to solve their territorial disputes on their own. In international relations trust is difficult to create especially if states are playing politics following classical and offensive realism however this study utilised commercial liberalism which views states as good responsible actors who can trust each other thus it is important to note that in international relations compromise is an important component. Basing on the argument of compromise the US and China should compromise to assure a more peaceful Asia Pacific region.

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