Sino-US Antagonism in the South China Sea; Is it the Second Cold War?



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Abstract
South China Sea is a region of interest for both China, US and many other nations. For China, the South China sea is as important as the Caribbean Sea was important for the US in the first Cold War. The US, through small states near the South China Sea like Taiwan, Philippines, and Vietnam and japan spar Chinese hegemony in the region. China is ready to transgress international law when things go against the interests of China in the periphery of the South China Sea. China has created synthetic islands in the South China Sea, and these constructions are viewed ambiguously by the US. The surveillance of US warships in the region and its military support to Taiwan, Philippines and Vietnam evidently depicts the existence of a second Cold War in the region. China's economy is an export-based economy, and most of the exports of China are sent through the South China Sea. An Apparent Clash of interests between the US and China is visible in the form of a new Cold War in the South China Sea.

Key Words: South China Sea, United States, China, Taiwan, Second Cold War

Introduction

The advancement of China's military prowess, its military modernization of maritime forces, and her naval potentialities with a robust economy and a huge defence budget prescribed her to act like a hegemon in the South China Sea. Such hegemonic contrivance of China has engendered myriad uncertainties in Washington. Many US allies like Vietnam and the Philippines are directly involved in the conflict of the South China Sea. Historically, this region has been an abode of territorial conflicts. States like Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, Philippines and Vietnam have different entitlements with different justifications in this region. China is the pivotal power, which acts as one party and claims her sole sovereignty legitimate only, in Parcels Islands and the Spratly Islands.

South China Sea is momentous for both economic and strategic purposes of China and the US, and it is opulent in natural resources. This is the hectic trade route in the world. Hillary Clinton said in 2010 that the US has a national interest in the South China Sea. (Symond, 2015). The cachet of the region has drawn China near to fight a full-fledged war with any country, including the superpower of the world in the region. 1/3 of the shipping of the world, a total of US\$3.37 trillion of international trade, passes through the South China Sea (SCMP, 2019).

Currently, China is performing her role as a hegemon in the South China Sea. Its hegemonic designs in the region have constrained small states like Taiwan, and the Philippines to get strategic backing of the US to craft a balance of power in the region. The US has doomed the hegemonic designs of China in the South China Sea by giving threatening annotations on the issue. Transfiguring a subsurface rock into an airstrip simply does not afford the privileges of

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 sovereignty. It does not permit restraints on worldwide air or maritime passage. _(Benner, 2015) This region is highly concerned with the future interests of the US primacy in the region. Obama administration has strengthened its relations with ASEAN group of countries and other groups located near the South China Sea like Myanmar to retort China in near future. US is fronting a tough balancing act in the South China Sea (SCS) because China is a key power with a grander military and technology in the expanse acts as one party to this skirmish. The other contenders in the region like Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, are not many powerful states, and they cannot play with China in a collective effort.

The latest developments in the South China Sea have shown the reality that a Sino-US conflict is inevitable in the region. In October 2015 Washington navigated a "guided-missile destroyer" within 12- nautical miles of the synthetic islands. The first in a sequence of arrangements scheduled to stress the independence of navigation in the area. Beijing notified that Washington should "not act blindly or make trouble out of nothing" (BBC, 2015) From May 2017, US has conducted 6 freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea (CFR, 2020).

It would be problematic for the US to create a balance of power in this region. The US has cautioned China not to "elbow aside" the nations in the South China Sea (SCS) which are in conflict with China_(BBC, 2015) A direct conflict between China and US in the region will be chaotic, and it will sabotage the situation further. The military might, defence budget, and the advancement of China in the space has made China a superpower in Asia.

In Asia, China acts as a hegemon, and it has become totally difficult for the US to direct China according to her despotic will. Beijing has cautioned that world war is "inevitable" unless the US discontinues interfering in the South China Sea issue. (Conspiracyclub, 2015) Like US-China will not respect international law if it states against the interests of China in the region. China wants to solve all these problems in the region by force, like a superpower in the South China Sea. Although the designs of China in the South China Sea do not threat the supremacy of the US in the world, it does it in the South China Sea. US and China have been locked in a bitter trade war since early 2018, which has tense two-sided relations on a number of fronts, including military to military interactions (Huang, 2019).

South China Sea fracas

The South China Sea has been a controvertible area for the last sixty years. There are more than one hundred Isles in this region. The most disputed Islands are Paratas Islands, Spratly Islands, Macclesfield Bank, Parcels Islands and Scarborough Shoal. There are six South Eastern Countries in the region which have different claims on these Islands. The conflict of Spratly and Parcels is stunning.

Taiwan, Vietnam and China have claimed the Parcels Islands. The Spratly Islands are being contested by Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and China. China Claims that it had sovereignty over these islands historically, but Vietnam dismisses this idea. China is using a demarcation line like a U shape rottenly called as 9 Dash line has provoked all other countries near to the SCS and started contesting this line.

Beijing claims sovereignty over nearly the entirety of the SCS and hoping that it could one day command who may transport its busy seaways. (Dawn, 2015)

At the Singapore Summit, US defence secretary Ashton Carter stressed to discontinue repossessions of land in SCS by China and other states, and China overruled it. Carter pledged to sustain US aircraft and warships in the international waters. (Benner, 2015)

Philippine is nearer to Spratly islands and claim on it on the basis of its nearness. Spratly Island is 100 miles from the Philippines and 500 miles from China. Malaysia also claims on the small number of Islands in Spratly.

The chief protagonist of the conflict in the South China Sea is China. The islands located in the SCS are strategically important for China to satisfy the supreme intentions of attaining supremacy in the world. According to Carter "it is unclear how much farther China will go" (Benner, 2015) the US is backing many South Eastern countries like Taiwan, Philippines to deal with its new competitor China.

Balancing act in the region has become a herculean task for the US. A direct conflict between the US and China in the region can be alarming for the whole world. The US will not remain silent when the Philippine and Taiwan are confronting with China in the South China Sea. China is not fearful of fighting a war against the US in the South China Sea. (Philips, 2015). China of 2015 is ready to face massive challenges, and it is in a mood to reply to the superpower of the time. The Global Times, a Chinese newspaper presaged in this way "If the US bottom line is that China has to halt its activities, then a US-China war is inevitable in the South China Sea" (Benner, 2015).

However, the conflict in the South China Sea is a conflict limited to a specific region, but it can influence the whole world. China is the second biggest economy of the world, and it has become a contender for the primacy of US in the world in many regions. This conflict has taken the form of a new type of Cold War. The US is backing her allies which are involved in this conflict to acquire her desired goals in the South China Sea region.

Taiwan has been a bone of contention between the US and China in history. The US has supported Taiwan many times in history, and currently, it is helping in her claim on the islands in the South China Sea. Her cooperation with Taiwan is aimed to counter the rising of China. Philippines is yet another ally of US in the region. Philippine is one of the greatest aid receivers of the US and it is ready to serve the interests of US in this region. If China confronts with Taiwan and Philippines then it simply means China and US are fighting a Cold War in this region. In this way, South China Sea conflict indirectly display a conflict between US and China.

According to the Chinese think tank, US is seeking to counter China's rise in the South China Sea because it has held 85 joint military exercises with its allies in the Indo Pacific region in 2019 (Ng, 2019).

Importance of the South China Sea

The South China Sea is an important region for both economic and strategic purposes. It is equally important for both US and PRC to fulfil their hegemonic ambitions in this region of the world. The location of this area has attracted the superpower of the world and its new contender in the world like China momentously.

Significance for China

"South China Sea is to China what the greater Caribbean was to the US in the $19^{
m th}$ century and $20^{
m th}$ century." (Kaplan R. D., 2015) China has become a contender of US primacy all over the world. Through its soft balancing tactics, China has created its unique balancing strategy, and China has created its soft image in the Middle East and Africa. China has gained favour in the Central Asian regions through regional cooperation. Now China wants to maintain her hegemony in the South China Sea. This area is both economically and strategically significant for China. "More than 50% of the oil tankers of the world pass through this Sea." (Usmani, 2015). In this way, it is a busier route than Suez Canal and Panama. World's five biggest shipping ports are located in this area. This area is rich in natural resources. Both oil and natural gas deposits are found in this region abundantly. According to an estimate by the World Bank, this area holds at least seven million barrels oil and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. (Usmani, 2015). China needs greater oil and gas reserves to fulfil its requirement of energy. China is searching for oil reserves all over the world; for this purpose, it has to make friendship with different countries in the Middle East and Africa. China will not give up the chance to conquer South China Sea because these oil reserves are closer to China. China 's growing economy has further spawned its necessity for oil and gas stashes. South China Sea reserves of energy will be more valuable for China.

According to Rand Report, 21 of China's 39 maritime routes and 60 % of Chinese trade pass by the Spratly Islands, which is claimed by Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and China_(Zhou, 2018).

Strategically this is the most appropriate area for China because Chinese seaports are located in this region. Sovereignty over the South China Sea will define the naval wherewithal of China in the world. As recently, China has cut off the communication lines of Countries like Japan and South Korea. Japan and South Korea are staunch allies of the US. This is, in fact, a direct threat to the US. In future, when China becomes an economic superpower, then it will target US allies through the South China Sea. Domination and primacy over the South China Sea will also define the journey of China from a major power to a superpower. China's ambition of supremacy compels her to claim on more islands in the region.

The South China Sea and the US

The US is the sole superpower on the land, sea and space. The aim of the US is to uphold her primacy all over the world at any price. The South China Sea, with its natural resources, appeals US and major ports and trade centres compel the US to take a special interest in this region. Some strong allies of the US like Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan are situated in this region. The US is apprehensive about the future of her allies in the region. It is in the hope of balancing China with their allies in the South China Sea with South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Taiwan. When China becomes a hegemon in this region, then it would be totally unacceptable for the US. In the post-Cold War period, the US is deeply fretful about countering new challengers like China. In the South China Sea US seeks chances to counter China.

The US has a potent interest in the preservation of regional amity and stability in the South China Sea. Open and unimpeded entrance, regional stability also bears both East Asian and American prosperity, like fight and forceful security rivalry would sidetrack scarce resources away from improvement shrink trade by intimidating the security of sea-lanes and lessen cross border savings. (Fravel, 2012) In this way, Chinese hegemony in the South China Sea can be hazardous for US interest in the region. The US do a lot of businesses through this region and do enormous cooperation with many states in this region. Strains in this region would be perilous for the economy and the cooperation of the US. US commerce in China may be set for a problematic time. (Byrne, 2015)

As in the history, the East China Sea has been a Sino-US hotspot. The dispute of the Senkaku Islands between China and Japan had provided many ventures for US involvement. The mutual security treaty of US with Japan can force the US when Japan challenges the domination of China in the South China Sea.

Chinese Hegemony in the South China Sea and US Reaction The reaction of the US

China and the US are good trade partners; this relation is aimed to boost up the economy of both the countries in a relative manner. Huge trade relations do not mean the absence of any animosity between these two states. The US is chary about the rising of China. The US is highly nervous about the hegemonic designs of China in the South China Sea. The US contains China both blatantly and surreptitiously. "The US navy sent P8 reconnaissance plane carrying navy and television camera crews to film Chinese island-building activity in the Spratly Islands, prompting warnings by a Chinese navy radio operator to leave the area. The warning went unheeded." (Benner, 2015) China's ambition of Island building is a hegemonic design of China which is a threatening activity for the superpower. To stop such advanced activities by a major power is a threat to the omnipotence of the US in the world. The US is suspicious that China will proliferate more islets in this synthetic way.

Ashton Carter rejected China's efforts of Island building by calling it "out of step" with the consent of the region. He said the US military aircraft and warships would remain operating in the region as acceptable under international law. (Carter, 2015) It is a direct threat to China in the region. The US is not in a frame of mind to accept the Island building activities of China. The US is threatening China directly because it has seen its own supremacy at stake in this region.

In the post-Cold war era, US's ambition has become to maintain her primacy in the world. China has been a major obstacle in the way of US ambition in Asia Pacific. Washington has good hopes about the future of their supremacy in Asia. For the 5 years the Obama government has converted South China Sea into a hazardous flashpoint. It has reinvigorated Philippines and Vietnam to press territorial assertions against China. (Symond, 2015). The defence secretary of the US told Aljazeera that they shell keep on the principal security authority in the Asia-pacific in the future. (Carter, 2015)

US is trying to threaten China in the South China Sea in various ways. By displaying guided missile destroyer US want to sojourn the island building activities of China in the region. This is such a tactic which the US used most often in the first Cold war with USSR. Chinese peaceful progress has been the headache of US and it has reached in the verge to show hard power to halt the growing progress of China in different parts of the world. "By using a guided missile destroyer, rather than smaller vessels they are sending a strong message." (Aljazeera, 2015)

The Obama administration has concentrated on the South East Asian region during his presidential tenure to counter China in this region. (Stansfield, 2014). US has many reliable allies in or near the South China Sea. Japan is a US ally in the North East, Australia and New Zealand in South East Asia. Near South China Sea Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and South Korea are most allied allies of the US. These nations are serving US interests here in this area. Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines had traditional animosities with PRC in history. The US has reinforced its armed relationships with the Philippines to augment its capability to shield its claims and to counterattack Chinese coercion. (Fravel, 2012) These countries are always seeking supervision and support from the USA to counter China.

The US will not remain taciturn when China becomes a hegemon in this region. When China attacks only one country in this region, then the US will come to rescue that state in a prompt manner because the US is earnestly concerned with the containment of China in the region.

Scarborough Shoal is very proximate to the Philippines; it is 150 miles from the Philippines and 500miles away from China. According to international law, the Philippines's claim becomes valid because it is nearer than PRC. The president of Philippines Benigno Aquino said, "I think everybody would welcome a balance of power anywhere in the world." (Aljazeera, 215)

Parcels Islands are nearer to another US ally in this region, and that is Vietnam. Spratlys Islands are nearer to Malaysia and Brunei. The US has good relations with Malaysia and Brunei too. These countries can also seek the guidance of the US in any emergency condition. The US is also seeking support from the Asean group of countries to resolve the problem of the South China Sea. The US is the greatest aid donor to many nations, which are located near to the South China Sea. Vietnam is trying to entangle the US in its power play with China by receiving US warships with resupply abilities along its South China Sea coast. (Kaplan R. D., 2015). American allies located near the South China Sea are intensely in need of US intervention in the region; they can stimulate the US to intercede in the region. US is all set to fortify its allies in the region and it will upsurge her financial provisions to the countries located in this region and US warships will continue to sail in these regions, considering it, the international waters. Although these Islands are very far from China but Beijing envisages her claim legitimate only in this region. A menace of direct confrontation between China and US is observable in this scenario. Thus, it is an outstanding challenge for US to counterbalance a highly advanced China in the South China Sea.

US is firming her relations with nations in the South pacific with the determination to contain China in the region. US has fortified her strategic connections with Singapore. Japan had interrupted three Chinese guard vessels in East China Sea and it would retort resolutely to Chinese violations to Japan's autonomous claims to the Senkaku Islands. (Shim, 2015). Japan is a staunch US ally and displaying her obedience to US by reacting against China in such a time when the tensions in the South China Sea are at peak. On 7th December 2015 US deployed Poseidon P-8 spy plane in Singapore for the first time. This act took place in such a situation when South China Sea

conflict is in its uttermost. Such a military activity is beheld by China an endeavor to contain it. (Reuters, 8 Dec 2015).

Great thinkers like Robert D Kaplan maintain the view that China has become a grave challenge for the supremacy of US in many regions. He considers South China Sea an important region for China to acquire a superior status in the world. He further maintained that the genuine contest for Pentagon is slowing down China's conversion into the leading military power in South Asia. (Kaplan R. D., 2015). In 18 November 2015 Obama called to stop the militarization of undecided Islands in the South China Sea during a high-level meeting with pacific leaders in Manila. (Gertz, 2015).

Different socialists behold US designs pessimistically and they cogitate the US an imperial power which is against socialist countries. The assertion of socialists is that US 's conflict with Russia in Syria and Beijing in the South China Sea are modules of an all-encompassing approach aimed at safeguarding an overriding position across the vast region. (Symond, 2015).

In the future the South China Sea will be a place where the US will examine its muscles time in again. It will face the harshest resistance from the side of China. The Defence Secretary of US declared that sixty percent of US's warships comprising six aircraft-carrier groups would be located in the Asia-Pacific playhouse by 2020 to device the so-called "rebalance to the Asia-Pacific" Strategy. (Economist, 2012)

The Pacific Fleet of US has made a plan for a great display of force as a threat to PRC that reveals its ambition to counter China's military activities; this was reported in the South China Sea (NG, US navy plans major show of strength in South China Sea as warning to Beijing, 2018).

According to a think tank based on Beijing, by positioning two Independence-class ships, the US navy is making her presence stronger in the South China Sea. This deploying of littoral ships suggests the increase of attack capability (Zhen, 2019).

Chinese Riposte

US intrigues in the South China Sea constrained China to give strict remarks about the US. Chinese Foreign ministry identified the US a country which double practice standards. China has intensely rejected the navigating of navy warships of the US near to its artificial islands in the South China Sea, calling it a "threat to China's sovereignty." (Aljazeera, 2015) Although the new Cold War which is being fought between China and the US was not clearly visible in the post-Cold War scenario, it has been crystal clear in the Issue of South China Sea. Beijing has been busy strengthening its defence capability in the region and giving signals that it will take steps to contest US armed forces in the region. (Gertz, 2015).

China is not in a position to take dictations from any power, including the US. Its military might and its economic growth have made it a hegemon in Asia, particularly in the South China Sea. The people of China have the capacity to make their own judgements about the events. They consider it no one's right to convey them about their actions. (Aljazeera, 2015) China does not accept unipolarity when it acts against the will of Beijing. In the issue of the South China Sea China seems ready to discards the dictations of the US in a unipolar world.

In response to the P8 reconnaissance of US, China has lost her confidence in the US and exhorted the US to correct its blunders. But contrarily the US contemplates her right to sail in the international waters according to international law. For US 9 dash line belongs to the international waters and artificial islands have no economic zones. China forcefully insisted the US side to meticulously handle China's solemn representations, instantaneously correct its blunders. And not take any risky or inflammatory acts that threaten China's sovereignty and security interests. (Aljazeera, 2015)

Beijing has re-joined that they will also shape necessary defence facilities on some Islands and reefs. (Gertz, 2015). China is ready to antagonize the US in the South China Sea. Chinese are not in a position to find the middle ground with the US in the region when the US attempts to

monitor the islands building activity of China. The term second Cold War will be echoed in the circles of social sciences, particularly in the spheres of experts of the international politics when a direct clash of Sino-US occurs in an issue like the South China Sea. Chinese military and defence are ready to answer any kind of intervention of the US in their claimed area, particularly in its Island making activities. Chinese foreign ministry told Aljazeera news that they are going to monitor the seas and airspaces, and they are ready to take all required initiatives according to the needs. (Aljazeera, 2015)

Although the two economic monsters of the world like the US and China are enormous business associates, they are showing different positions on the issue of South China Sea, and these states have lost confidence on each other. This loss of reliance can be hazardous for the business relations of both these major powers of the world. China further stressed that the US activities in the South China Sea had "damaged trust", and China will act on "all necessary measures" to sustain her domestic security. (Dawn, 2015)

As Mearsheimer rightly stated that a much more powerful Beijing could also be likely to try to drive Washington out of the Asia Pacific region. As in the history US hard-pressed the great European powers out of the Western hemisphere in the nineteenth century. He presumes that China will come up with its own account of Monroe dogma as majestic Japan did in 1930. (Mearsheimer).

In 2019, the military of PRC threatened the US to stop incitement over the South China Sea, after the deployment of a littoral battleship for a freedom navigation operation in the disputed waters for the first time_(NG, 2019).

"The construction of reefs in the disputed territory of the South China Sea was "Fully within the scope", and it is the sovereign right of China," said Lu Kang. The foreign ministry of China refused the proposals of the US senate to punish the individuals of China for "illegal and dangerous activities in the South China Sea. Lu called this legislation as a violation of international law and relations (Lu, 2019).

Conclusion

The China-US struggle in the South China Sea is a kind of "Cold Confrontation" US considers PRC as a "Revisionist" and "Adversary" as far as the issue of South China Sea is concerned. US is strengthening her global Allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia and the UK to compete for PRC. US and China have encountered in the South China Sea from very near, and it has entrenched divergence between the two sides_(Xiangmiao, 2019).

South China Sea has been the centre of grander consideration for the major powers of the world like the US and PRC. The conflict in this area is deeply rooted in the modern history of the region. China had had many clashes with Vietnam and the Philippines in the past. It was much stress-free for the US to counterweight China in the region and to halt China from attacking smaller states in the South China Sea because China was not such a powerful state in the history as it is today. PRC of 2015 has been a superior challenge for the primacy of the US in different regions of the world.

The surveillance of the US reconnaissance vessels cannot discontinue the Island building activities of PRC in the South China Sea. US is using her traditional policies to counter China in the region like all such tactics which the US used during the Old Cold War with USSR. The US is trying to fortify the military might of her allies located in the South China Sea to retort any possible violence from China on them.

New Cold War has appeared in its all forms and manifestations. Prior to this issue the signs of the New Cold War were abstruse for a common observer, but the conflict of the South China Sea and Island building activity of China in the region highlighted the re-emergence of Cold War in its full swing.

As the people of China talk about the grandest issue in a highly unassertive Way. _(Shahab, 2008) Similarly, they stated much more about the role of the USA in the South China Sea. They declared openly about the "Double Standards" of the US. It demonstrates that they are preparing to retort the dual morality of US in the region and beyond. China has lost her conviction in the US, and it will greatly shake the relations of both these countries in the world. It will also disturb the business ties of Sino-US, while they are the biggest trade partners.

The unconcealed goal of the foreign policy of the US is to counter any challenger in the world. China is a new challenger in many regions, particularly in the South China Sea. In the name of peaceful progress, China wants to become a superpower of the world. The interests of both the states collide with each other unknowingly. Although China and the US don't want to confront each other, the interests of both these nations will remain in clatter with each other in future. The existence of US forces in the Pacific region is to be expected to grow in reaction to China's enlargement. The US will be no longer the preeminent power in the region of Asia Pacific. (Mearsheimer).

If two nations with different ideologies are good trade partners, then it does not necessarily display that there will be no strain between them. It does not mean that they will secure the interests of each other. They are competitors and tensions will grow further when China becomes a more powerful nation. Before the 1990s there were few points of divergences between the US and PRC, but after 1990s these points became manifold, the relations of PRC and US became complicated because China had become a competitor of the US.

Obama administration concentrated on the states located in the South East and the South China Sea to counter the hegemonic projects of the PRC. South Korea and Japan are grandest allies of the US to work for its interests in the region, while Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam Malaysia and Brunei are looking for the support of US to counterbalance China in the region. Smaller states like the Philippines and Vietnam cannot stand against China without the assistance of the US. Both these states claim on different islands with the justification of their proximity to the Islands. All the Islands like Spratly Parcels and Scarborough Shoal are very far from China but her hegemonic designs, military might and strong economy compels her to demarcate a U-shaped line in the South China Sea to enclose the area of her sovereignty.

This is nothing than a Cold War, the nonstop Chinese computer hacks of US warships, Pentagon records, and maintenance records constitute a war. The current situation will get worse. The new Cold War is permanent in nature and this is understood by strategists and generals (Kaplan R. D., 2019).

The Island building activity of China is in fact a foreign territory constructing process. US distinguishes it the threat for the peace of the world but China displays it an effort for peaceful progress. This is in fact a highly advanced hegemonic design. If China becomes successful in this design then it will continue the process of creating more and more Islands. There would be a new competition of constructing artificial islands in the world. This activity does not depict an economic activity, but it shows the strategic ambitions of a nation.

Thus, it is clear that the conflict of South China Sea is not only a conflict of China with few states like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines and Brunei but it is an indirect conflict between China and US. The new Cold War, which was started between China and US has been clearly visible in the issue of South China Sea in all its forms and manifestations. No one can avoid this issue by calling it a tension among few states but this is the new cold War which is being fought between China and US.

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