

The War With China

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Abstract

The US, who currently dominates the globe, is coming face to face with the economic boom of China. The United States is currently the most powerful country in the world with the largest economy in existence. As China's GDP increases approximately 8% a year, it inches closer and closer to America's record, making it the second largest economy in the world. China has also significantly increased its defense spending 175%. As China continues to grow, the US goes through measures to keep its preeminent position ahead of China. Competition between the two countries is nothing new; the US and China have had disputes all throughout history including America's exploitation of China. The theory of realism describes this process in which both countries strive for power and dominance. Gaining and maintaining power is key to the survival of the state, which is the ultimate goal within realism. Additionally, the theory of realism emphasizes the idea that war is unavoidable. With authorities such as former President Trump and current President Biden, foreign policies are adapted to defend the US and contain China. These actions may stimulate the impending "clash" of the countries. For instance, the imposing of trade tariffs and the trade war that resulted. Although China may not be ready to take on the US quite yet, the balance of power may switch precariously against the US in the near future.

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As China's economy continues to surge, the US prepares itself for a new rival; an upcoming power that may one day take over. The US currently has the largest economy in the world and dominates globally. With China's extreme growth, the United States may not be able to hold this position forever. There is talk concerning China taking the place of the US and becoming the new preeminent power. However, with the international relations theory of realism, the US will certainly put up a fight. Realism describes the inclination of countries to do whatever it takes to gain or maintain power. There is an overarching theme of "everyone for themselves" in which the main goal is survival. Realist thought also encompasses the idea that war is inevitable. As for China and the US, history and recent struggles between the countries support the possibility of a war. Americans and the Chinese have a history of conflict and aggressive behavior towards one another. If this behavior continues, it is likely, with support from the realism theory, that the US and China may go to war. In addition, the foreign policies put in place between the two countries also determines the possibility of a war. This is where former President Trump and current President Joe Biden take part in the effort. With similar goals but different steps to get there, the two authorities strive for power and protection of their country.

The two have even used realist approaches to attain this goal. Realism, the theory of maintaining power, thoroughly explains the prospect of a coming war between the US and China.

Historical Context

Relations between China and the United States date back to the first interaction between a peaking China and a country brand new to the competitive global economy, the US, and have continued ever since. There are various examples of relations and conflicts between China and

the US from recent years. In particular, the International Relations and Diplomacy reports that “tensions between the United States and China in 2010 were related to the economy” (Yujue & Yutong, 2020). However, to fully understand what instances occasioned tensions between these competitive countries, historical context is needed. At the time of the birth of the US in the late 18th century, the United States was freshly developed and was rather weak compared to the experienced, seemingly impenetrable China. In the very beginning, interactions between the two countries were excessively limited; “the American government played a minimal role, consistent with the fundamental American policy of seeking to extend trade without much political complications.” The most significant risk the US took with China was their independent businessmen who made it their own responsibility to get involved with China’s economy. In fact, throughout the 1780’s, the US and China lacked any formal treaties or diplomatic relations that could tie the two countries together. Despite the lack of interaction between the United States and China, the Chinese nevertheless chose to act towards the Westerners with aggression when they had the chance. The consequence being that, later in history, when the US and China switched positions on a global scale, “Americans responded the same way when the shift of power became irresistible and regrettable to China” (Zhang, 2010). The United States dished aggression right back to China, giving the Chinese what they asked for when they acted this way towards the US in the past. From here on, the US and China traded off aggression with one another as the rising United States made various attempts to involve itself in the superior Chinese economy.

Over time, relations between the US and China expanded and the two countries were on competing levels. This allowed for increased interaction, and of course, conflict. American and Chinese history resembles a roller coaster with the ups and downs between the foreign countries.

For example, the Treaty of Wanghia in 1844, which demanded stringent responsibilities of China in respect of tariff duties, exemption from local law, and for the US, allowing their citizens to trade in Chinese ports. Clearly, this treaty was beneficial towards the US and changed their outlook on China. This treaty as well as the pre industrialized state's tendency to copy European behavior during the mid-19th century increased US interest in China. At this time, Europe was predominant on a global level and "the United States had been a junior partner, but it was nonetheless a participant in the events that exploited and humiliated China" (Zhang, 2010). This example demonstrates the downfall on the US-China relations roller coaster as China suffered from the advantages taken by the Americans over the Chinese.

The overarching theme between China and the United States was the tendency of the Americans to let the Chinese economy suffer when the US would benefit from it. Several historical instances suggest that the "Americans only gave words of sympathy, but never any material support" to China. This tendency of the US brought about the 1867 Burlingame Treaty where the US was forbidden to interfere with China's internal affairs. However, this treaty went to waste when the US refused to abide by it and broke the rules. This period of time, the 1870's and 80's, was considered one of the darkest times in US-China relations. It was filled with murders of innocent citizens, boycotts, extreme racism, and more. From the United States' perspective, it was "when China stopped cooperating with the U.S. global agenda, that U.S. elites started to feel pressure from China on the global stage" (Hung, 2019). China had its own plan and was following nationalistic ways. The 1900s were full of reforms for China in an effort to modernize and find national unity. The strengthening of China's society, the increased nationalism, would create an obstacle for the US to try to exploit the country.

It was after World War 1 that China was able to emerge as a great power. However, China started out on a rough patch when Japan used the country as “economic assistance” during the first world war. Under the restraints of Japan, China’s economy suffered and hoped for another great power to help them, the United States. Unfortunately for China, Japan already had secret treaties with European countries in which the Europeans pledged to “support Japanese claims to German concessions in China.” The Chinese were at a loss here; not only was Japan against them, but several of their European allies. At the Paris Peace Conference, the US, China's only hope, sided with Japan. The US feared Japan leaving the conference, as they threatened, since the League of Nations would crash without them. China was left in the dust and could only rely on itself. After China’s May 4th Movement, the country calmed down and the rest of the world let China figure it out on her own. By 1928, America and China were confirmed friends with a tariff treaty. Once again, the United States and China were on good terms. Peace was seemingly established between the competing countries and China’s economy was on the rise. China’s rise can be marked with various statistics including its “9.8 percent average annual GDP growth since 1979” (Hudda, 2015). Around this time is when US President “Roosevelt nominated China as a great power and one of the five members of the United Nations Security Council” (Zhang, 2010). At the same time, the United States made its debut as THE national power after defeating Japan.

The Growth of China

Global economics began to take a turn with the rise of China. As this once weakened country picked herself back up, the US found itself a genuine rival. As a matter of fact, “tensions between the United States and China in 2010 were related to the economy” (Yujue & Yutong, 2020). China's economic boom began to stir up fear within the United States and with good

reason. China had advances in its military, defense spending, technology, wealth, and the list goes on. For instance, in the span of 9 years during the 21st century, there was a 175% increase in military expenditure by China. This immense expansion would give China an intimidating military that could be used to fight a war if needed. The Chinese military was from then on considered the “‘world’s largest military build-up’ via a huge expansion of military spending and technological advancement” (Hudda, 2015). A large military is not only a threat to other countries, but an obstacle for taking over or taking advantage of a country. In addition, other countries would want to increase their own military in fear; a simple characteristic of the theory of realism (Ebbighausen, 2020). To further the fear of other countries, China’s military growth can also be exemplified by their significant enlargement of annual defense spending. Just in the stretch of 2 years, China inflated her defense spending budget by \$30 billion prior to 2010. (Hudda, 2015). This increase can only mean the creation of an expansive collection of arms and other military technology. In truth, since 2012, China escalated her defense spending even further, with an astounding 86% increase (May, 2020). There is a pattern of a consistent increase in defense spending within China; something sure to induce fear. The excessive collection of military weapons and machinery would imaginably be perfect to prepare for a war or potential conflicts. China truly has a strong defense. This layer of protection around the Chinese was only possible with the country's unrivaled economic growth.

A rising economy not only means stability and power but change in leadership and motive. Authorities in China, knowing how strong their economy had become, gained incentive to take advantage of this new power. There were ideas thrown around of obtaining Asian or even global hegemon (Hung, 2019). China would rise up and challenge the US hegemony; many believe the US is a regional hegemon or even a global hegemon. A new rivalry would be created

as the US and China battle for global dominance, for global hegemony (Ebbighausen, 2020). China would be its own dominating country without a dependency on the US like before. With these ideals in sight, the eager state increased aggression and went after her goals. China's capital exports to areas such as Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and more became more truculent; the country was eager and quick to take action. Not only this, but China added focus to her "State Owned Enterprises and marginalizing foreign enterprises in China" (Hung, 2019). China was in focus and did what they felt necessary to keep their economy growing. It became a competition on many fronts; everything was a competition. Considering the fact that the United States was/is the current country dominating the global economy, this would induce fear and desire to retaliate. The US certainly would not want to lose their many gracious titles to a country that they previously exploited and used. However, the US would have a lot to compete with. China's advances did not stop at capital exports and foreign and state owned enterprises. The Chinese experienced increased wealth as 600 million citizens were no longer considered impoverished. This wealth would create immense benefits for the rising country in various ways, especially in the economy. China was able to surpass its previous rival and exploiter, Japan, in 2011 in terms of economic size. It was now the US and the runner up, China, with the largest economies in the world. This caused a "shift in global dynamics and evolving geopolitics" according to the United Nations (Hudda, 2015). Countries including China itself would have to adapt to this global change. Foreign relations would take on a new approach with China as one of the leading powers.

As China's economy strengthened and this once weak country regained its power, the US found itself a true rival. The United States would be threatened by China who now had the power to truly compete with the US. Statistics even showed logical cases in which China would surpass

the US in several aspects of the economy. It is estimated that, “Measured strictly by GDP, China will likely surpass the US within the next few years.” The US, which is currently number one with the highest Gross Domestic Product, faces the threat of replacement in this category. On one hand, some may assume China is at its peak right now and its steady rise may come to a halt. However, when examining the facts, this is not very likely. For instance, China reached a point where it became the primary source of labor for not only its own country, but for other companies outside of China who desired cheaper labor. China’s labor was in great demand as well as its other industrial products; thus, boosting China’s development (Sibley, 2015). The importance of this lies solely in the idea that foreign countries and China have a mutual relationship in which they both benefit from one another. This suggests that cooperation is not likely to cease. China will continue to grow as other countries continue to desire their labor and other necessities. As long as China continues on the path she's on right now, researchers presume she will surpass the United States. This powerful country will reach a point where China has a real chance at winning a war with the US if it were to come about (Dobbins et al., 2012).

Realism

With a rising China and a competitive United States, the two countries are seemingly on the verge of a conflict. A particular international relations theory best explains the coming of war with China. Realism is the idea that focuses primarily on the competition for power, which generally ends in violent conflict. It is the fight to preserve the power a country holds as well as the pursuit of gaining power (Genest, 2004). The US and China are perfect candidates for two countries fighting for power. With realism, states struggle for power and security; the survival of the state depends on this. Thus, when it comes to survival, countries will do whatever it takes, even if it means war. The strengthening of the military and the increase in defense spending both

count as taking steps to protect one's country. A commonality within realism is the idea that when one country goes to lengths to protect itself or pursue its interests in gaining power, other countries watch anxiously. It is like a domino effect in which countries build up their arms collection to match those or surpass those of other countries (Dalei & McKinney, 2015). Specifically, in the case of China and the US, the competing countries would be in their own arms race. "As states compete, they exert pressure on other states' borders, ... invoking fear that a rising power must be viewed as a probable danger" (May, 2020). While the US watched China's defense spending spike as aforementioned, they would feel fear and a desire to compete according to realism. Increased competition from the US could be noticed by China, who could retaliate even further. A situation similar to the Cold War could arise. In addition to a new Cold War sparked by constant retaliation and passive aggressive competition, a US-China rivalry would lead neighboring countries to choose a side. Allies would be made just like in the Cold War days; the US would dominate the Western hemisphere and China in the Asian hemisphere (Ebbighausen, 2020). With China and the United States at the top of the global chart, they are destined to clash according to realism. Realism most adequately describes a coming of war with China.

The realist perspective of the interactions between China and the United States focuses on the competition for power in which surviving is all that matters. Realism in this case specifically focuses on the potential conflicts between the two countries caused by the chase for power and dominance. The idea is that the stronger an economy is, the less likely it is that their rival will be able to take them on; there is less of a threat. Consequently, the whole goal is to be the superior power. With this in mind, "big nations hope to gain power at the expense of their opponents" (Adlakha, 2020). Nations will target one another if it means they benefit from it. As

for China and the US, to obtain a global hegemony they must compete with one another; they must gain that title at the expense of the other country. A realist view from those supporting the global takeover of China is that the flourishing country must obtain the title as the greatest military power, a position the US currently holds. This must be done in order to obtain global hegemony and change the international system (Hudda 2015). Evidently, the United States is defending this position and China would have to battle for it, creating further conflict with the US.

The probability of a war with China begins with realism. This theory of ‘everyone for themselves’ has been represented by both China and the US. In addition, this view on life most thoroughly explains the interactions between China and the US that would spark a war. For instance, the issue of Taiwan. The US is essentially obligated to defend Taiwan due to a law made in 1979 (Kristof, 2019). However, China has drastically different relations with this neighboring state. China’s outlook on Taiwan can be represented by a simple quote concerning Taiwan's desire for independence ““We will use whatever means we have to prevent it happening”” (Hudda, 2015). China is ready to impose whatever it takes on Taiwan if it means keeping it from declaring independence. China exemplifies her military capabilities with this realist quote. China could just as easily use this approach on other countries if they get in the way of China’s goals. The US happens to be in the way of China’s supposed goals right now. This strengthens the argument that China has a realist approach to global dominance. As for the US, they have attempted to control the growing Chinese economy as China’s growth gets in the way of American success and dominance. US authorities have undergone several containment policies to attempt to control the prospering country. The United States has made an effort to reverse the progress of China’s economy, specifically the technological advances (Ebbighausen,

2020). In China's view, another country trying to impede on their progress would be a major problem, especially if this country has the kind of power the US does. Although it has not happened yet, conflicts may easily arise if the US and China continue on this competitive path.

Not only is it the aggressive behavior of both China and the United States that may cause an upsurge of disputes, but the tendency of war to break out between rivals. History has demonstrated the ability of countries to go to war with one another. When countries feel threatened or attacked, often a war is brought about. Wars have been used to solve all sorts of political and economic issues. In fact, "In 11 of 15 cases since 1500 in which a rising power rivalled a ruling power, the outcome was war" (Hudda, 2015). Wars have been natural and consistent among rival countries. There is an underlying inclination to go to war with a competitor. These countries have an undying desire for power, which is demonstrated in the constant battle for power and dominance. Foreign relations and policies between countries are bound from basic human nature in a way that shows their instinctive behavior to strive for power and primacy (May, 2020). These basic tendencies are supported specifically by realism. Realism sparks the need for war and the strive for power that gets you there.

US Foreign Policies

As for the United States, their approach to foreign relations tends to change little by little with each President. Considering the circumstances with China, the US has been putting together special foreign policies with this competitor. Trump, for example, approaches foreign relations with the idea America First, a realist approach (Green, n.d.). His goal is to have the US survive and continue to dominate on multiple platforms. He follows up on his realist view of world politics as he claims, "it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first." Interestingly enough, Trump had actually geared his focus towards North Korea, the country that has been

greatly difficult to work with throughout history. Trump announced a vision he had for coming relations with the Indian Ocean area; North Korea is an area of focus as well as trade (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Although it seems as if Trump is favoring North Korea, he has on many occasions for the past 40 years verbally attacked North Korea for cheating the US with their inequitable policy. A policy in which North Korea maintains heavy trade while expecting the US to protect their country. As for other parts of Asia, Trump has also paid heavy attention to China. Namely, the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement that would bring about US allies to coerce China to do whatever they desired. However, Trump refused to take part in this agreement and instead took a realist approach; he enforced steel tariffs on these allies (Green, n.d.). Trump further sustained his ‘everyone for themselves’ attitude. No matter the country or the opportunity at hand, America comes first.

To further Trump's ‘America First’ application on foreign relations, he dealt with China rather aggressively. With China’s dramatic and explosive rise to power, countries including the US have taken notice and caution. There have been conventions specifically to express concerns about China such as the gathering of Association of Southeast Asian Nations authorities. From this point on, Trump began to enact his defense strategies against China. In particular, the steel and aluminum tariffs imposed on China, but exclude Canada and other allies of the US. A trade war was even sparked between China and the US due to the passive aggressive tariff appliances from both countries. Within this trade war, “the Trump administration also imposes new restrictions on Chinese telecom firms, labels China a currency manipulator, and threatens to halt all private U.S. investment in China” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Although this trade war eventually came to an end, it highlights the tension between the dominating countries.

Trump's approach on foreign relations with China exemplifies realist behavior with a desire to dominate.

With the exchange of President Trump for President-elect Joe Biden in 2020, foreign relations between the US and China had some alterations. Unlike Trump, Biden's goal was to renew and strengthen alliances and the overall democracy. He believes this will keep America on top (American Leadership, 2021). The goal is to trade Trump's 'America First' policy for a diplomacy-focused approach to international relations. However, although Biden claims to have a different approach than Trump, the goals are seemingly the same. Biden's new plan called for an extreme focus on competition with China. The Biden Administration took steps to "sanction Chinese officials for human rights abuses, impose tariffs in an ongoing trade dispute, and build regional alliances to counter Beijing..." (Stepansky, 2021). China is still the enemy and the ultimate goal for the US is to keep its power and dominance. This calls for containment of China no matter who the President is. A new approach that Biden brought about to face China is the strengthening of the middle class. According to Biden, this is key to beat not only China, but anyone else who comes in the way of the US. For example, North Korea, who is a common competitor of the US. President Biden's and Donald Trump both gave North Korea special attention in hope to decrease the threat that the country currently imposes. As for President Biden's approach to North Korea, he has hopes to campaign with US allies in order to take on North Korea in hopes of denuclearization (American Leadership, 2021). Seen here, Both Biden and Trump took steps to deal with North Korea and protect the US. All things considered, Biden takes a less aggressive approach to foreign relations than Trump has in the past, but the overarching goals are the same. The most significant differences are the steps to reach these goals.

With the rise of China, the US comes face to face with a competitor who may one day surpass the United States. China's growth has skyrocketed in the last few decades and hasn't slowed yet. Fear arises in countries such as the US who take China's growth as a threat to their own survival. Considering the rough history between China and the United States, mentions of possible war and conflict are often discussed along with the topic of the flourishing Chinese economy. The US and China both have a history of fighting in various wars and have had their own conflicts with one another. As China continues to grow, conflict with the US becomes more and more likely. Using the realist perspective, which best explains a possibility of war with China, war is inevitable. Realism describes the tendency of countries to battle for power to create the best possibility of survival. Everything becomes a competition and survival of the state is the main goal. This is where former President Trump and current President Biden come into play. As president, they held the responsibility to determine foreign policies with other countries, for instance, China. While both presidents took different steps to face parts of Asia, both authorities had similar goals: the protection and survival of the US. With the US on top, the ultimate goal was to keep its power and dominance. If this war were to occur one day, it would be a battle of the strongest powers in the world. As of right now, the chances of winning the war are in favor of the US; however, with continued growth of China, the future may hold different results.

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