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Sino-US Rivalry in the South China Sea: A Hegemonic Stability Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article is written in the background of the growing Sino-US rivalry in the SCS dispute. It discusses the political, military, and economic initiatives of these countries to save their interests in the region. The South China Sea has become the center of Asia Pacific politics in specific and global politics in general. Its geostrategic importance and huge resources have attracted the attention of world powers in this region. China, the regional hegemon, claims the SCS region as its core interest and provides the basis to its claims based on historical usage and a part of the ancient Chinese dynasties. Though the US is a non-resident state in this dispute its defense relations with other claimant states, its long-term interests in this region, and increasing political and military rivalry with emerging superpower China, all these factors have forced the US to play a significant role in this dispute. This research tries to find out the answer to the research puzzle about the factors behind the growing rivalry between the US and China in the SCS. The research has employed qualitative methodology within the post-positivist paradigm. The study is conducted under the lens of Hegemonic Stability Theory. This study concludes that the prevailing situation in the SCS would further get hot if either side behaves assertively to secure interests in the region. The conclusion suggests that peace could only be achieved if both countries show patience and solve this issue through multilateral negotiations.

Keywords: *Politics, Hegemon, South China Sea, Geo-politics, Spratly, Parcel*

A Prologue to the SCS Dispute

The South China Sea is situated on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. It is the busiest sea for trade and other activities for the region as well as the world. Chinese claimed that China had ruled in the South China Sea over the Paracel and Spratly Islands since 200 BC (Hu & McDorman, 2013). British were the first who initiated navigation and geo-survey of the islands of the South China Sea in 1762-1802 and 1805 and published the map of the South China Sea with its different features. It was Richard Spratly who visited the Spratly Islands of South China Sea near the Philippines in 1843 and gave his name to these islands. British did not show their interest in these islands because these islands have no attraction and economic charm

in those days (Buszynski & Roberts, 2014). China and Vietnam have conflict over Paracel and Spratly Islands in the SCS whereas Philippine, Malaysia, and Brunei have claim over the Spratly Islands due to the part of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). China claims that this sea has remained in effective control of the Chinese government from the Han dynasty (206 BC to 9 AD) till 1933 when France intervened and occupied the Spratly Islands. China got control over the Spratly and Paracel Islands after the Second World War (Wu, 2013).

After the French withdrawal from the Indochina region in the 1950s, China occupied half of the Paracel Islands. On the other hand, South Vietnam sent its troops and got control over the remaining Paracel group of Islands. The US left Vietnam in 1973 and the very next year, China attacked other remaining Paracel Islands and got control over the whole Paracel archipelagoes in the South China Sea. Further, China moved towards the Spratly Islands in the 1980s and occupied six features of islands in 1988 after a fight with Vietnamese troops. China continued its slow and steady strategy in South China and occupied Philippines controlled Mischief Reef in 1995 and got control over Scarborough Shoal in 2012. China initiated the construction of artificial islands in 2014 to strengthen its position in these islands (Bouchat, 2014).

Hegemonic Stability Theory

To analyze the behaviors of China and the US in the South China Sea region, Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) within the broader framework of realism has been used. Hegemonic Stability Theory suggests that there would be peace in the international system if there would be one dominating state which would ensure stability in the system. The international political system is anarchic and there is no supreme power that can stop other countries from aggression. In this regard, every country needs to enhance its power for the sake of its survival. Power distribution creates a dilemma among the states in the anarchic system.

This research focuses on four elements of Hegemonic Stability Theory:

1. A powerful and stable political system is an essential component of hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001). China has a socialist and politically stable one-party system. This stable and productive system has made China a powerful country in the region.
2. Military power is the second important component of hegemony. China is becoming an emerging and rapidly growing military power. Working in alliances is an important characteristic of a hegemon (Cox, 1997).
3. A powerful economy plays a vital role in the establishment of hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001). China is the second-largest economy after the US. The regional countries are heavily dependent on China's economic influence and cooperation.
4. The "Will" to lead the world and acceptance of will by other countries is the fourth essential ingredient for a hegemon (Cox, 1997). After WWI, the British Empire could perform the role of hegemon but later on, due to the weak economy and military, it failed to lead the world and was replaced by the US after the Second World War. Hegemony does not remain in hiding. Most of the states should accept the power of the hegemon. The absence of a hegemon resulted in the Second World War.

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A coercive hegemon usually acts within the offensive framework. The foremost thing for a hegemon is to ensure the order in the world. The anarchic structure of the world has three defined features. One of them is that there is an absence of any supreme authority who can protect other states from the aggressor. Second, is that the drive to become fittest helps every state to possess some military capabilities mostly offensive in nature. The third is the unpredictability of a state towards other states. A state can never be certain about the intentions of other states. This fear can never be eliminated. In this way, every state becomes a part of the arms race against the powerful neighboring state for the sake of its survival. This situation gives birth to a tragic situation of the security dilemma. Great powers have no reason to fight each other but their uncertainty about their survival forces them to seek power (Mearsheimer, 2001).

China is a rising power and regional hegemon. It has possessed all abilities to act as a regional hegemon. The US is the existing global hegemon and China is an emerging hegemon. The US has established its hegemony in the East Asia Region and giving a tough time to China in regional politics. The US has initiated two different policies with the same theme to contain in the Asia Pacific. The Pivot to Asia by President Obama and now the Indo-Pacific policy by President Trump aims nothing except to contain China to ensure the US hegemony in the world

China's Stance over the South China Sea

China is rapidly enhancing its power and leaping forward for the leadership of the world. China has a great role in the power politics of the Asia Pacific region. Miller (2017) says that during Mao's period, China got independence from colonial powers and strengthened itself. Deng Xiaoping time was the period of opening up and China excelled in economic growth and now the period of Xi Jinping is on and now China will get its real place in the world. This is the time of China's domination and hegemony in the world. China has launched huge projects to its increased influence in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Xi Jinping introduced the 'Belt and Road Initiative' project to link Asia, Europe, and Africa by road and maritime routes (Chan, 2018). He also introduced the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a competitor of the World Bank (Wang, 2019). These two projects will help to fulfill China's dream of its real place in the world.

President Xi initially announced the 'Belt and Road Initiative' project during his visit to Kazakhstan on 7 September 2013. He purposed the construction of a road that would connect China with Central Asia, East Europe, and West Europe including the Indo-China region. Xi Jinping visited Indonesia in October 2013 and proposed a "Maritime Silk Road" which would connect East Asia, South Asia, Middle East, East Africa, and the Mediterranean. Xi Jinping's program of Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road is also called the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) initiative (Larcon, 2017). China has proposed six corridors under one belt and one road. These six corridors include Central-China and West-Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAC), China Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC), China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB), Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC), and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Amir, 2016). Belt and Road Initiative will connect 67 countries to enhance economic integration between Asia, Europe, and Africa (Miller, 2017).

During the Xi Jinping visit to Indonesia in October 2013, he delivered a speech in the Indonesian parliament and purposed the first time “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” (AIIB) which would enhance regional connectivity and promote economic cooperation (Larcon, 2017). The AIIB formally inaugurated on 16 January 2016 and 57 countries became its founding members. China had 26.06 percent voting power and had veto power in major decisions (Shatz, 2016). The Belt and Road Initiative and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank these two projects have increased the power of China in the world.

The world’s power is gradually shifting from west to east. China is involved in disputes in the East and South China Seas which can undermine the future of China in the region as well as in the world. This is the reason why China is not making any compromise on these issues politically. President Xi stated in 2013 that China would not make any compromise on territorial issues. He said that China is interested to solve the sea issues through peaceful dialogues. This statement is China’s official policy on the SCS. China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) gave a similar statement that it is looking towards the “bottom lines” of China’s claim and bottom lines as per President Xi is that China’s sovereignty and territorial interests are not negotiable (Heath, 2017). President Xi delivered a speech in the Politburo on 31, July 2013 and said that China loved the peace and believed in a peaceful development, ignoring disputes for the sake of peace and development. He said that we believed in solving maritime disputes through political and diplomatic means. President Xi visited three countries i.e., the UK, the US, and Singapore in 2015 and issued policy statements regarding the South China Sea by saying that China had a long and continuous history of sovereignty over the islands of South China Sea. He showed solid resolve to not compromise on its territorial claims in the SCS. In a speech in Singapore, he said that China’s core interests are based on national territories and sovereignty of China over its territories (Xiaolin, 2012).

To have a military presence, China is constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea. Chinese stance over these constructions is nation-centric. After concluding East Asia Summit, China’s vice foreign minister defended the construction of military bases on the Spratly Islands while stating that it was what required for China’s national defense and protection of reefs and islands.

There are many hegemonic and assertive political and military steps that China has taken after 2009 and caused fuel to fire of South China Sea dispute among the claimant states. There are many steps taken by the Chinese administration in the SCS which include the construction of a communication network in September 2012 to cover the whole SCS. China had initiated the first scheduled patrolling by maritime security forces from the Chinese province to the sea in November 2012. China’s administration announced to build new infrastructure in Woody islands and created a new Sansha administrative district to support the claimed territories. China had issued a new passport with a map of China’s nine-dash lines. Hainan provincial authority had announced for calling police forces in the SCS for the sack of reducing illegal activities in SCS. Previous China’s President Hu Jintao presented a report on the 18th Chinese Communist Party Congress which described that China had a great interest in SCS. He stressed to build maritime power in the SCS. He also emphasized to utilize the SCS for the marine economy and development (Morton, 2016).

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China's foreign policy is following the philosophy of Sun Tzu. He, once, said that the greatest victory comes without fighting (Minford & Tzu, 2003). China wants to get its claimed territories through peaceful dialogues and political initiatives. From the very start of the SCS dispute, China has offered many peaceful dialogues for the settlement of the dispute. There are many political efforts made by China and the member states of ASEAN to solve the dispute with mutual consensus. There are many drafts presented by the ASEAN forum to resolve the issue peacefully. The following are the details of the drafts presented in the ASEAN forum.

The first effort which has been made by ASEAN countries to resolve the SCS dispute peacefully was the "ASEAN declaration in the South China Sea 1992". This draft describes the SCS issue as a most sensitive issue and all members are committed to resolving the issue in a peaceful manner (Buszynski, 2003).

The "Declaration on Conduct" (DOC) of Parties was presented in the ASEAN forum by China and ASEAN members in Cambodia on 4th November 2002 and was signed by all ASEAN members and China. The DOC gives the following principles for the signatory countries:

The parties of the SCS dispute will follow and respect the UNCLOS, the freedom of navigation principles described in the UNCLOS, and solve territorial and jurisdiction disputes under the UNCLOS and abstain from any activities which cause to enhance the SCS dispute. China purposed more initiatives including freedom of navigation in SCS, bilateral dialogues, and a resume of mutual projects to enhance peace and stability in the region (HU & McDorman, 2013). These efforts to solve the SCS dispute were based on win without fighting.

China's military outreach in the SCS

Rising powers always concentrate to build up their abilities and powers. They build up their military capability to increase their influence. China is consistently enhancing its power and influence in the world. It is enhancing its military capability with time. In 2017, China has increased seven percent of its military spending and secured the position of second-largest global military expenditure after the US. China wants to extend its military influence in the South China Sea and strengthening its influence in the Spratly Islands. Rival states do not accept China's ambitions. China's naval troops are proactive and armed with the latest technology in comparison to its opponents. China's assertiveness is obvious through its actions in the South China Sea against the naval coast guards of the Philippines and Vietnam. China is even proactive against the US naval fleets and freedom of navigation operations. It is developing high-tech military bases on Spratly Island. These islands contain full military bases and launching pads. The basic purpose of developing the artificial islands is to enhance military power in the South China Sea and the case of emergency bring more troops through rapid air services (Kwarteng & Atuahene, 2018).

Bi-annual China's National Defense white papers praised PLA as a protector of China's interests in the SCS and enforcement of China maritime law in the sea and helpful in fisheries and oil and gas explorations in claimed areas. President Xi appreciated the performance of the PLAN and its growing capabilities in the SCS. The State Oceanic Administration published a report about the budget of China's

PLAN. According to this report, China's maritime resources contribute 9.6 percent to national GDP which is targeted to increase to 13 percent in 2020 (Song, 2019).

Military Strategic white papers of 2015 affirmed the stance that China's claimed territories in the South China Sea are not negotiable. China's claims over the East and the South China Sea have increased the security concerns and challenges for China as well. One of the Chinese PLA General elaborated this situation as more critical and difficult. Military official documents described the South China Sea conflict as a maritime region with the highest potential of conflict. The US presence in the region and the involvement of other countries fuel this issue and create difficulties and dangers for China (Heath, 2017).

Woody Island and Construction of Artificial Islands:

China is building artificial islands on the Spratly archipelago and upgrading military base on Woody Island. These developments have helped China to have its strong military presence in the SCS. The central purpose behind these constructions of artificial islands is to enhance its influence in the SCS. The Parcel and Spratly Islands both are strategically important places in the South China Sea. These islands are located in very strategic positions and half of the world trade passes through them. Woody Island and Chinese new seven artificial islands on the Spratly Islands have enhanced China's military and economic influence in the region.

Woody Island is an important part of the Parcel archipelago and an indispensable military checkpoint to cater to China's interests in the region. It has strategic importance and is situated along the shipping route between Singapore and Hong Kong. China got control over this island in 1956 (Amir, 2016). The PRC has constructed the first airport on Woody Island in 1990 and named it Yongxing (Amir, 2016). Woody Island is an operational, administrative, and military unit for China in the South China Sea. This island's airstrip is ready for military and cargo landings. China deployed the latest subsonic anti-ship cruise missile system on Woody Island (Pilger, 2015). China deployed a J-11 fighter jet on Woody Island. This is being verified by the Image Sat International (ISI) on 7 April 2016 and the US defense has also verified it. Fox News reported that China has deployed the latest Harbin BZK-005 reconnaissance drones on the Woody Island during May 2016. These drones have multiple features; they can fly up to 40 hours (Mastro, 2012). Its arms cannot be viewed in satellite images. The US showed its concern over this new development.

China has built new artificial and man made islands on seven coral reefs in the Spratly archipelago from 2013 to 2015. These artificial islands cover 3,000 acres area of the SCS (Chen, 2015). These islands are made for military purposes and strategic point of view. In April 2015, the US satellite images showed that China has initiated the construction of an airstrip on its claimed territory of Fiery Cross Reef. China is converting Fairy Cross Reef into the most important strategic point in the South China Sea with a long airstrip where any plane and fighter jet can easily be landed. In November 2015 China has announced for installation and construction of 50-meter-high lighthouses over the Spratly Islands. As per the statement issued from the foreign office after the East Asian Summit on 22 November 2015, China would build military facilities for the preservation of its national interest in the SCS. China started its commercial flights on its newly constructed Fiery Cross Reef at the beginning of 2016. China is further determined to construct new islands. This

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situation is very alarming for Vietnam, the Philippines, and the US. Director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at CSIS, Gregory Poling described that some suspicious images have taken by satellite showed that China has installed high-frequency radar on the disputed Cuarteron Reef. This radar can watch surface and air traffic in the South China Sea (Chen, 2015). The US, Vietnam, and the Philippines are observing China's construction of new islands and deployment of arms with suspicion and concern.

Woody Island and artificial islands in the Spratly Islands have enhanced China's influence and power in the region. China has control over the sea lines of communications in the SCS. Its military presence in the South China Sea is deterrence for regional countries as well as for world powers. Experts enumerate these developments as the testimony of China's hegemony in East Asia.

Economic Superiority of China

China is the second-largest economy based on nominal GDP whereas the first largest economy is based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). China's GDP growth was 6.9% in 2015 and 6.7% GDP in 2016, 6.9% GDP in 2017, 6.5% GDP in 2018, and 6.2 in the first three months of 2019 (Song, 2019). China surpassed Japan in 2010 and secured the position of the second-largest economy after the US. China became the first largest economy in terms of PPP outshining the US in 2014 (Song, 2019). China is the biggest energy consumer in the world. It is accounted that China is consummating 23 percent of the global energy. Coal and natural gas are the main sources of China's energy consumption (Yu et al., 2020).

South China Sea dispute involved the highest economic benefits for the regional countries. The South China Sea provides the passage to \$ 5 trillion annual trade. It has vital importance for the regional economic powers. It is also one of the biggest maritime routes of the liquefied natural gas (LNG). Most of the East Asian countries export LNG from Qatar, Australia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It is estimated that about 6 trillion cubic feet of LNG which is half of the global LNG pass through the SCS (Metelitsa & Kupfer, 2014). Big industrial powers of this region like China, South Korea, and Japan rely upon Middle Eastern oil which is 25% of the South China Sea traffic. The East Asian countries export finished goods from the west and they all rely on this route. The oil transported from the Middle East reaches the Malacca strait through the Indian Ocean and enters into the South China Sea (Kaplan, 2016).

The economic importance of this region covers 17 billion barrels of crude oil as well as 190 cubic feet of natural gas (Miller, 2017). These natural resources can full fill the energy needs of any country and boost the economy of that country. This sea is very fertile for fishing. It contributes 12 percent of the world fishing annually and highly contributes to the GDP of the coastal states especially China, Vietnam, and the Philippine, Brunei, and Malaysia. Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes are the hubs of oil, gas, and fishing resources. The main disputes in three countries are surrounding these archipelagoes. During the 1960s, several countries of East Asia conducted surveys and found that this region is full of oil, gas, and mineral resources. After the discovery of oil, the race for the ownership and sovereignty of these archipelagoes has increased. Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) conducted a study in November 2012 and estimated that about 125 billion

barrel of oil and 500 trillion cubic feet gas is still undiscovered in SCS (Cordesman & Colley, 2016).

China is well ahead in this contest of SCS and devoting itself to control the geo-strategic place and resources of the sea and working hard to occupy the islands. China's influence over the SCS means its influence over the East Asia region and strong position via a vis ASEAN and Japan. In this way, China will become the hegemon of the region on economic grounds as well as get control over the vital sea.

The US Approach towards the SCS Dispute

The geostrategic position and resources are the main reason behind China's consciousness about this region whereas other regional actors such as Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei are also active for their sovereignty claims over these islands. The US as the global hegemon has become a part of this game and wants its share in these resources. It has established strong alliances with other stack holders against China and provoking Japan, Australia, and India against China due to this regional dispute. The SCS is important for the US for three reasons: first, it secures the US trade and military interests. Second, it is checked to restrain and contain China's hegemony in the East Asia region. Third, its control is necessary for the protection of the US allies such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, and some of the ASEAN member states (Raine, 2011).

Freedom of Navigation and Military Presence

The US has great concern over China's assertiveness in the SCS. More than \$ one trillion trades of the US passes from this sea. The US does not want to see China dominating this place. Though the US is a non-resident state, has no territorial claims in the SCS however, it has ensured its heavy presence in the sea under the guise of freedom of navigation operations. The US, Japan, and other European countries believe that China's military presence in the SCS will harm the free flow of trade in the sea. The US with the help of its allies is adamant to protect global commons and it includes the SCS in the global commons. China has never shown any gestures to stop the passage of trade of other countries in the sea. According to UNCLOS, no state can face any obstacle from other states in international waters. Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 nautical miles comes under the sovereignty of a state and another part of the sea is the part of the international sea and the international sea is the subject of international law. The US Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) has conducted operations in the South China Sea against China's claim of the Spratly and Paracel Islands. China has responded aggressively to the US FON in Chinese territories. China claimed that the US is involved in FONs in its territory without its permission. It also claims that this US behavior is an obvious violation of China's sovereignty and international law (Raine, 2011).

Under the Pivot to Asia policy and now under the Indo-Pacific Policy, the US intends to shift its 60 percent military to the Asia Pacific. There are 40,000 US troops in Japan and 16,000 are deployed in the area of the second place of Japan which is called Afloat. The US has deployed 28,500 troops in South Korea and 500 rotational troops in the Philippines. A Strategic place called Guam contains 4,500 US troops. Singapore and Malacca Straits are strategically important places and the US has deployed four Littoral Combat Ships near Singapore moreover 2,500 troops have been decided to be at Darwin in Australia. The US and Australia are discussing a

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plan to deploy a large number of US marines in Perth and want to establish naval bases as well over there (Lyon & Tow, 2005).

The US Political Hegemony and the SCS Dispute

The US is playing an active role in the SCS to prevent China from taking hold in East Asia. The Asia Pivot was the US strategy against China. The US has perceived China as a threat to its hegemony. US President Obama arranged a meeting with ASEAN leaders in California in February 2016. The meeting was summed up with a joint statement to respect territorial sovereignty, equality, political independence, and other issues related to East Asian states. All participating countries were agreed to maintain peace and stability in the region with the mutual corporation (Miller, 2017).

To contain China, the US is making alliances with ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia, and India. The US has increased military presence, alliances, and joint exercises in the SCS and has shown clear emblem to China that the US does not want China's assertiveness, military aggression, and hegemony in East Asia. Some analysts consider that the SCS dispute can cause a war between China and the US. Miller (2017) describes such a possibility in his book "China's Asian Dream" with an example from May 2015, when China warned the US surveillance aircraft passing near Spratly islands. This event aggravated Chinese nationalist emotions. A Chinese newspaper "Global Times" wrote that if the US will not change its attitude in the SCS, it could cause a war between the US and China. Through these events, it is evident that such activities by the US may increase the anger of China in the SCS region.

Economic Hegemony of the US:

Many countries adopted a liberal economic system in East Asia after WWII under the US-led modernization project. This project was initiated by the US for economic development to protect the East Asian countries against the communist danger and its expansion. To bring them into its area of influence, the US has provided huge economic aid to these countries. The US especially concentrated to empower Japan and helped it to become an economic in the region consequently stopped the expansion of communism in the East. The US military adventurism in Korea and Vietnam increased the importance of Japan for the US. Japan has gradually become a regional economic power under the flag of the US. The US has provided economic aid and military security to Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea in the East Asia region (Chiang, 2015).

The US has the world's largest economy, with \$21.4 trillion in 2019, and enjoys unparalleled and unmatched economic influence over the world institutions and countries. China is the world's second-leading economy with \$14.140 trillion in 2019. In terms of the purchasing power parity (PPP), the US is second to China. The US secured 2.4 % GDP growth in 2017 and got little improvement in 2018 with a nominal increase of 0.1percent. But next year brought the lowest rate of 2.3% growth rate. That was the lowest economic growth in US economic history. But due

to Covid-19 the US faced economic disaster and got -6.1 GDP growths during 2020. The US is facing great challenges in the field of the economy (Nurasiah et al., 2020). World Bank, IMF, and Federal Reserve Bank have predicted that the US economic position will improve in 2021. Already the US economy was trying to recover from the economic recession of 2008 but now the Covid-19 caused a huge setback for the US economy. The main reason behind the US budget deficit and public debt was the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the cost of more than 1.5 trillion dollars according to the estimation of the US government in 2014. The US has the world's most advanced technological sector, particularly in the computer, military equipment, medical, and aerospace. The US per capita GDP is 59,500. The US public debt was 81.2 percent in 2016 and 78.8 percent in 2017 of its GDP (Joyce & Prabowo, 2020).

Conclusion

This study concludes that China, through its economic, military, and diplomatic influence, has started to impose its norms in every bilateral and multilateral negotiation happening on the SCS dispute and the endpoint of every setup has unilaterally favored China. This tendency manifests that China is trying to establish its hegemonic stability in the region. Every activity happening in the SCS is now overshadowed by the Chinese military presence. China's assertive behavior in the SCS, its islands making, installations of high-tech military instruments, etc show that China is acting as a coercive hegemon. However, it does not seem to take over the US in global politics but one thing is established that China is not willing to compromise on the SCS and willing to change the dynamics of regional politics to protect its core interests. The rise of a new hegemon is only possible when the existing hegemon is in decline. Now the question is, is the US in decline? The answer to this question is very complicated. It could be stated that the existing hegemon though is in decline but has full potential to overcome it and China is not in a position to become global hegemon to dictate its terms in the world. Two successive administrations of the US have introduced very proactive policies to ensure US hegemony by containing China. The only viable option for China is to not confront the US and the US should not intervene unnecessarily in SCS politics. Peaceful resolution is the only option available to the contestant states in the sea. China has also shown its willingness to resolve the dispute through peaceful means. Unnecessarily involvement by the US and needless assertiveness by China could trigger conflict in the region.

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