

**South China Sea Security Dilemma an Epicentre of great Power
Competition**



Submitted By: Taimoor Hassan

**Topic: South China Sea Security Dilemma an Epicenter of great Power
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Supervised By: Mr. Sarfraz Ahmed Rana

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES MAIN
CAMPUS ISLAMABAD**

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***“China is a sleeping giant, let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will move
the world.”***

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

Abstract:

This research paper seeks to explain the security dilemma being triggered by the increasing might of Chinese naval power in South China Sea. According to the findings of this research paper the show of power may indicate the growing Chinese concerns regarding ensuring the security of their trade activities or being offensive to deter other major powers not to intervene in South China Sea. But this assertive move has led to the rise in the concerns of the other claimant states in South China Sea leading to the security dilemma in this region. Qualitative as well as quantitative research in this paper reveals that if this trend will continue then conflict management and mutual cooperation will become a distant dream in South China Sea pushing it in a bog.

Introduction:

South China has become a focal point in International News as well as the analysis of the journalists. South China Sea is a region South of the mainland China encompassing Vietnam, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia and archipelago known as first island chain which has been named by Beijing as “nine-dash line”. However, in 2013 China included Taiwan in it marking its territory and was renamed as “ten-dash line”. So, there is dispute over the ownership of more than 200 tiny islands and reefs which is poisoning its relations with neighbours. China has the ambitions to assert its power by controlling the passageways through the chain of islands. This area provides access to the most important shipping lanes of the world. In peace times these passages are open for free trade but in the war times these could be easily blocked chocking Chinese economy. Similarly, this is also the part of the maritime silk road which connects China with Europe via Indian ocean, red sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean Sea. On the hand China is trying to revive ancient silk road named as new Eurasian land bridge Economic Corridor known as OBOR. However, maritime silk road passes through Strait of Malacca which is controlled by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore which are close allies and staunch advocates of US involvement in South China Sea. This is the reason that during war like situation or due to cold war with US strait of Malacca can be easily choked for the Chinese trade which can crumble its economy. So, in this case Chinese economy would prove to be the wall of sand. China decided to launch CPEC as well as new Eurasian land bridge economic corridor as an alternative route in case strait of Malacca is no longer available to conduct trade. But China has adopted an offensive strategy to deal with allies of USA who also have claims over the territory owned by China. This has led to the arms race in this region because China is becoming offensive by increasing their naval might and patrolling in South China Sea. This offensive behaviour has provoked sense of insecurity in other claimant states of South China Sea known as “Security Dilemma”. States accumulate power in response to the increasing power of others triggering security dilemma which disturbs balance of power. However, China claims that it’s becoming defensive rather than offensive as it cares about its territorial waters claimed by it in South China Sea marked by nine-dash line. In this research paper we will discuss how security dilemma is prevailing in South China Sea making it an epicentre of next conflicts.

Research Questions:

- 1. Why China asserts its influence in the South China Sea?**
- 2. How China's growing naval power triggers security competition in the South China Sea?**
- 3. What are the strategies of major powers vis-a-vis the South China Sea?**
- 4. Is Quad balancing power or further escalating conflicts in the South China Sea?**

Literature Review:

This is a descriptive, qualitative and quantitative study where data has been acquired from a variety of platforms such as books, news, articles and publications made worldwide. This includes sources and perspectives of both nuclear as well as economic powers of the age i.e USA and China. We have conducted a brief analysis of Prisoners of Geography: Ten maps that explain everything about the world, written by Tim Marshall, published in 2015. Revenge of Geography: What the map tells us about the coming conflicts and the battle against fate, written by Robert D. Kaplan, published in 2012. Article with title, Cooperation and Security Dilemma in the South China Sea, published by University of Indonesia, written by Arimadona: assistant lecturer at University of Indonesia and Rizky Widian: lecturer in International Relations department at Parahyangan Catholic University of Indonesia. News article published in Reuters having the title, China announces South China Sea drills close to the Vietnam Coast, on 5th March, 2022. News article published by Asia Times having the title, Time for India to play bigger role in South China Sea on 7th March, 2022. A detailed article published by Air University Alabama, United States of America, written by a commander in US Navy Jon Mark having the title, US-China International Law disputes in the South China Sea, on 9th July, 2021. Report with title, Asia Pacific Trade and Investment Trends 2020-2021, published by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. News article with title, Beijing, Washington argues over Naval activity in South China Sea, published by Dawn on 21st May, 2021. While in order to have Chinese perspective for their claim over South China Sea we have consulted various chinese research papers like Studying the South China Sea: The

Chinese Perspective written by Yun Sun published on 9th January, 2012. Another article having title Understanding China's Position Over South China Sea Disputes was published by Institute for Security and Development Policy with brief analysis of the real essence of Chinese claims over South China Sea. Another impressive research article presenting Chinese perspective has been "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea; Implications for Security in Asia and Beyond" written by Jihyun Kim published by Strategic Studies Quarterly in Summer 2015. This research article has not only discussed Chinese perspective but also explained situation by applying Thucydides Trap. Another important research article has been Perspectives on the South China Sea Dispute written by Nguyen Hong Thao and Binh Ton-Nu Thanh published by The National Bureau of Asian Research on 8th March, 2018.

Theoretical Framework:

Cooperation has always been an important aspect in International Relations. Like liberalism is an optimistic view which indicates that there should be mutual cooperation and barrier free trade across the globe. This will promote interdependence and interconnectivity ultimately minimizing the chances of conflicts and wars between the states. Like according to Immanuel Kant, the state can cooperate and form a harmonious society. While on the other hand Realist view is pessimistic in nature according to which cooperation is difficult because of the anarchical system of the international politics even if there are common interests among the states. According to this approach there is no permanent enemy or friend in international politics. In short even if states somehow manage to cooperate with each other then again anarchical international system become a major impediment in that. Suspicion of being exploited or fear of the violation of sovereignty actually hinders the cooperation and mutual interdependence. In the case of security dilemma in South China Sea realist approach will be more applicable because it talks about pessimistic behaviour of the states where these are only concerned about securing their mutual interests and a situation of suspicion persists between states concerning their survival and sovereignty. The concept of Security Dilemma was first described by British historian Herbert Butterfield in 1949 but the term itself was coined by John Herz in 1950. Security Dilemma can be described as a situation in which armament or actions taken by one state to enhance its security may provoke other state also to maximize its security in order to restore the balance of power in that particular region. However, this concept was first discussed by Thucydides when he wrote about Peloponnesian war fought between Athens and Spartans back in 437BC-404BC. Thucydides wrote that "Growth of the power of Athens actually led concerns to Spartans ultimately leading to the start of Peloponnesian war."

Another important concept here is Thucydides Trap. The term Thucydides trap was popularized by American political scientist Graham Allison. According to Thucydides Trap there will be more tendency towards war when an emerging power threatens to displace another existing great power as a regional or international hegemon. As in this research paper we are addressing the security dilemma in South China Sea then we are in perfect position to apply realism because there will be no cooperation and de-escalation in conflicts between the states. We will be discussing and analysing security of all states in South China Sea in multiple perspectives which is claimed by China. Geo-political theories may also be helpful and applicable to explain Chinese assertiveness in South China Sea. Rimland Theory which was proposed by Spykman in 1942 as an antithesis to the Mackinder's Heartland Theory. According to the Rimland theory whoever controls rimland will control world island. Whoever, would control world island would soon control the world. This theory was very famous during the Cold War era when USSR tried to beyond the heartland and control rimland. Rimland is an area which consists of amphibious states having access to the international water bodies and are not landlocked. This is the reason that all states lying in the rimland have access to the narrow water passages and trade routes hence giving the control of all the natural resources in their hands. But China is the region which lies both in heartland as well as rimland. So, China is trying to control heartland by initiating OBOR and rimland by reviving and controlling the maritime silk road passing through South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. Hence, we can assume that China is trying to control Rimland and by controlling maritime silk road they have the intentions to influence and control the world politics.

Hypothesis:

“Security dilemma in South China Sea is likely to prevail due to US involvement in politics of the other regional states and as a consequence may undermine cooperation between China and other regional states. In contrary to this China will be more assertive by mobilizing its navy to counter increasing US presence in South China Sea which would eventually cause insecurity or in other words security dilemma in the region.”

Security Dilemma in the South China Sea

The South China Sea is blessed with massive natural resources like oil and gas. It's also very important with strategic point of view because a massive trade having worth of \$5.3 Trillion dollars about One-Third of global trade was conducted through it in 2021. South China Sea also connects Pacific Ocean with Indian Ocean via Strait of Malacca which has a lot of strategic importance. China conducts about 60% of its world trade via South China Sea ultimately closely connecting China's economic security with South China Sea. Tensions in the South China Sea escalated for the first time back in 2011 increasing the chances of conflict between China and other claimant states of the region.

China has risen as the second most powerful state economically as well as militarily after United States of America. But the million-dollar question is that why China has always been asserting its influence in the South China Sea. China has always been claiming sovereignty over the South China especially in the area of Nine-Dash lines. These nine dash lines includes archipelagoes and islands like Parcel Islands, Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. Here it's also pertinent to mention that in 2009 maps of all these claims were issued by China with the claims that they have been owning the area of nine dash lines for over 2000 years. According to China it was the first state to explore and exploit the resources of the South China Sea islands and to continuously exercise sovereignty over this area.

According to China first maps of South China Sea were actually published during the rule of Ming and Qing dynasties who ruled 1368-1644 AD and 1644-1912 AD respectively.¹ Even first navigational charts of the South China Sea were drawn up by famous Chinese admiral and explorer Zheng He in 13th century. Chinese have been reiterating that their claims and possessions over South China Sea have been acknowledged by many international sources in the modern history. This includes atlases published by Britain, Germany, France and Soviet Union back in 1950s and 1960s. According to Chinese perspective the rise of the new claimants of the South China is a recent development mainly encouraged by US influence over these regional states with the aims of resource extraction.

¹ Chang, "China's Naval Rise and the South China Sea: An Operational Assessment" 11.

Chinese claim over the sea of South China Sea has been relatively undisputed till 1930. After 1930s all the events were leading another human catastrophic event known as WW-II claiming the lives of thousands of innocent souls. By now all the western colonial forces and especially assertive Imperial Japan had the ambitions to utilize the geostrategic position and the value of the Spratly islands in specific. So, by 1939 Japan annexed parts of the archipelago with the intentions to have control over Southeast Asian states and also to prepare itself for the invasion of Australia.

However, Japan was badly defeated after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 ultimately leading the end of WW-II. At that time Japan was forced to give up all its claims over South China Sea and all those areas which it had occupied there. Hence, we can say that from the end of WW-II in 1945 and the taking back of all those areas occupied by Imperial Japan, the post-war ownership of the South China Sea islands have remained disputed. The matter became more complicated due to clash between Mainland China and Taiwan.

Chinese sources have repeatedly been referring to the Cairo Declaration (1943) and Potsdam Declaration (1945). According to these declarations the areas once annexed by Japan in the South China Sea will no longer be part of post war sovereign territory of that country and all those territories which actually were stolen from China by Japanese like Manchuria, Pescadores and Formosa will be restored back to the Republic of China. This is the reason that Chinese have asserted their influence in South China Sea and have always been coming up with solid arguments to prove their claims over nine dash lines. They have the right to have control over the exclusive economic zones of the Parcel Islands, Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal lying in nine dash lines.

This Chinese assertiveness and growing strategic posture over the South China Sea have caught much international attention. However, Beijing put the blame over the other claimants of the South China Sea for increasing US influence in the region, being provocative and worsening the matter by not engaging in bilateral talks to settle the dispute peacefully. Although there were some developments when Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was signed between China and ASEAN states back in 2002 with the agendas like peaceful settlement of disputes by building trust and confidence, complying with the principles of international law, environmental protection, freedom of navigation and self-restraint in the conduct of activities.

Despite its signing Vietnam failed to abide by the agendas of the document and continued to consolidate its illegal claims in the South China Sea. While according to China it kept looking for peace, cooperation and resolution of differences by implementation of Declaration of Conduct of Parties signed in 2002. Assertion of China's naval power has started changing the already unbalanced power structure of the South China Sea. According to Chinese perspective they have right to assert their power over their claimed territories in South China because it encompasses 4 pillars of its foreign policy. These 4 pillars are;

- i) Major power relations (USA)
- ii) Relations with neighboring states (India, Japan, and ASEAN members)
- iii) Relations with developing states (India and ASEAN members states)
- iv) Multilateral Diplomacy with regional states (ASEAN states)

So, above are the 4 pillars of Chinese foreign policy but rising tensions in South China Sea are pressing Chinese policy makers to come up with timely decisions, effective recommendations and analysis of the situations. However, Chinese policy makers blame US for increasing tensions in South China Sea due to their pursuit of influence in the region. In Chinese perspective they are asserting their influence in South China Sea just because of US presence because it's trying to alienate China's friendship with neighboring states especially Philippines and Vietnam who are claimants of the South China Sea. USA has developed military alliance with Philippines and is pursuing strategic interests by having close relations with Vietnam just to contain the growing Chinese influence in region.

The South China with the lapse of time has become militarized due to continuous US presence and China's assertion ultimately leading to militarization of region. Other claimants of the South China Sea like Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia also have followed the suit by modernizing their armies and especially naval power to counter growing Chinese influence in the region. So, we can assume that growing Chinese naval power has triggered militarization of the region leading to competition in the extension of militaries especially naval power. Other than the claimants of the South China Sea there is also the involvement of extra regional states like Australia, India, USA, Japan, UK and France which are further heightening the security competition in the region.

China has been quietly upgrading his military infrastructure in the South China Sea. Because other rival forces have been actively involved in joint military exercises by claiming that they have the right to go anywhere according to international law. But China's growing military

might has greatly contributed to its confidence to assert its power in the South China Sea against ASEAN member states who are also claimants of the region like Vietnam and Philippines. If there will be any standoff in the South China Sea then China has significant naval, marine and coast guard forces to cope with in the region. According to US Department of Defense the People's Liberation Army Navy is the largest navy in the Indo-Pacific region. Extra regional states like Japan, France, USA, Australia and UK are also trying to secure their interests in the region and are also members of "QUAD" known as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

USA has been clearly unable to provide enough security goods which could ultimately enable Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia to collaborate collectively with one another to cope with growing Chinese assertiveness and bring it on negotiation table by forcing it to abide by International Law. While on the other hand China has very firm stance of claiming the area lying within nine-dash line. The most important aspect here to keep in mind is that without US assistance regional states are too weak in capabilities and divided in terms of strategy to stop Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. Vietnam has very less options despite having strong army in the region because it shares land border and strong trade ties with China which actually limits its approaches towards containing China. On the other hand, Malaysia's army is not strong like Vietnam and has been cooperating with USA and Vietnam in Spratly Islands to contain China but still it's reluctant to expand its military might.

In the recent years India also has highlighted its military role in the South China Sea through its policy of "Look East" and now with the new policy of "Act East".² India also has strengthened its relations with ASEAN member claimant states of the Indo-Pacific region. India is also part of India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral security dialogue. India also had dispatched warships to Vietnam for the first time and conducted joint exercises in the South China Sea. US also has sought to have balancing with China in the South China Sea by following freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) which are mainly undertaken by vessels of a national navy.

This has heightened debate over the freedom of navigation that whether these apply on military vessels or not. While on the other hand Chinese legal scholars and policymakers argue that right of freedom of navigation which is given to civilian vessels do not apply to military vessels. Apart from freedom of navigation US also has planned to hold military exercises in the South

² Chang, "China's Naval Rise and the South China Sea: An Operational Assessment" 12.

China Sea just to challenge China's claims in the region. Hence it can be assumed that USA is trying to deter China by conducting joint military exercises in the South China Sea just to show its influence and power in the region. This is overall leading to "Security Dilemma" in the region which means that all states are making arrangements to enhance their security as much as they could due to growing Chinese naval power and increasing US presence and its utter stance to contain China.

According to geopolitical writer Robert D. Kaplan "South China Sea is to the Chinese in the 21st century what the Caribbean was to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century". In the beginning of 20th century USA first focused on consolidating the control over the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean and then moved to control other seas around them. China is also asserting power to have influence over two oceans like Pacific and Indian. This is the reason that China is investing heavily in all states having deep sea ports like Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

Below Okinawa in the South China Sea is Taiwan which is off the coast of the China and separates South China Sea from East China Sea. China has always been claiming Taiwan as its 23rd province but it is currently an American ally armed to teeth by Washington. America had signed Taiwan Relations Act in 1979 according which Washington is committed to defend Taiwan in the case of any Chinese invasion.

There is also struggle for influence over the Strait of Malacca because this is the choke point which controls the trade between Japan, South Korea, China, ASEAN member states and rest of the world. In order to go towards energy producing gulf states and to enter in the Indian Ocean one must have to pass closely from Vietnam which has cordial relations with the USA. Then must go near Philippines which is a US ally before passing through the Strait of Malacca which is lying between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia which are almost diplomatically and militarily connected with USA. The Strait of Malacca is about 500 miles long and at its narrowest point it's almost 2 miles wide. Anyone having control over the South China would have the capability to choke the Chinese economy by stopping its trade through Strait of Malacca. This is the reason that US is investing heavily in the regional states just to extend its influence ultimately enabling it to control the Strait of Malacca. However, growing Chinese naval power and its assertiveness in the South China Sea is putting gloom over the US attentions.

Now coming towards the strategies of major powers in the South China Sea then we will be mainly focusing on China and USA. China sees its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea as its core national interest. This indicates that China will show zero tolerance over its sovereignty and claims of other regional states in the South China Sea. China has economic and military aims to achieve in the South China Sea. That's why China is assertive in the region and has the intention to achieve above mentioned aims by influencing other regional states. It's estimated that in the South China Sea is hiding around one hundred and five billion barrels of hydrocarbon reserves.

This is the award in the form of high energy reserves which are waiting for whoever will ultimately be the king of the South China Sea. Another reward is the Strait of Malacca which is the shortest sea route to Africa and Gulf states for South East and East Asian states for trade activities. Almost 80% of Chinese trade pass through the South China Sea that's why China's control over this region will ultimately enable it to conduct all trade activities freely without the influence of any foreign actor. Similarly, the South China Sea is favorite fishing spot for the Chinese which is fulfilling the needs of their energy requirements at mass level. China will obviously mind to lose such a source of energy because it has become necessary for China to ensure its energy security by having control over it.

Beijing also have used its diplomacy to contain the discussion over the disputed territories by regional states and have preferred to resolve such issues through bilateral dialogue rather than multilateral.³ China also has focused on regional claimant states especially ASEAN members and have discouraged them to involve any external actors in such negotiations involving the settlement of matters like the South China Sea. This is the reason that ASEAN member states who are claimant of the territory in the South China Sea have been repeatedly warned by China against inviting USA to participate in such bilateral negotiations. In 2010 and 2012 former Chinese ambassadors to Philippines warned that any attempt by Manila to involve US in discussing the territorial disputes between them in the South China Sea would result in a situation which neither state would like to face. So, diplomatically China has been vocal that the involvement of US in bilateral dialogue to settle territorial disputes of the South China Sea will further complicate the situation.

In order to have unopposed military capabilities China has invested heavily in developing deterrence mainly focusing on radar technology, anti-satellite weapon systems, anti-ship

³ Kaplan, "Asia's Cauldron" 14.

missiles, anti-submarine weapons and ballistic missiles. In order to avoid direct confrontation with its competitors in the South China Sea China has developed a fleet of paramilitary forces having support of military at its backup if necessary. China is investing heavily in developing such forces like Maritime Safety Administration, Fisheries Law Enforcement Command, Chinese Maritime Police and paramilitary forces which are at the front line when matter comes to the South China Sea dispute and China's sovereignty claims. Hence, we can assume that China is putting all his efforts to deter its competitors in the South China Sea especially regional claimant states of ASEAN. Now we will have a wet look on the US strategy to deal with growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

After WW-II US has been enjoying dominance over the Pacific and Indian Oceans playing the role of protector and guarantor of the protection of regional sea lanes. In the past decade China has come up with assertive policies and has increased its speed of deployment of paramilitary forces, development and construction of military facilities and dredging of the South China Sea to construct new islands. Due to such Chinese incentives US has moved to revive its hegemony in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and announced pivot-rebalance strategy in an attempt to keep its alliances in Asia. US policies are to ensure that freedom of navigation and commerce remain unimpeded and establish cordial relations with the regional states. US strategy is to keep China away from becoming regional hegemon by containing its influence over the regional states. Militarily Chinese Anti-Access and Area Denial (AD/A2) capabilities are keeping the US out of the region.

These Chinese capabilities pose challenge to the US installations and forward operating bases in the western pacific and freedom of access to international airspace and waters on which US economy is heavily dependent. In response US has developed air-sea battle, operational access, joint access and maneuver concepts to confront growing Chinese influence in the South China Sea. However, implementation of all above concepts is slow and not sufficient to deter Chinese AD and A2 capabilities. However, US is focusing on gaining bases in the region diplomatically from the regional states like Philippines. Philippines is more affected by the Chinese sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. That's why Philippines has signed bilateral agreement in 2014 which is considered as central to the Philippines security and gave access to the US over its bases. US is also bridging close relations with Vietnam, Indonesia and Taiwan to strengthen its feet in the South China Sea. In the nutshell we can assume that US strategy is based on having more and more dispersed bases in the region to ultimately challenge Chinese AD and A2 strategies. However, China now considers itself in that period of history

which has the opportunity to give it the status of global power. Now China is not ready to pull back unilaterally from its position and is seeking to have total dominance and hegemonic position in the South China Sea.

US has introduced a single trading community under TTP excluding China. The TTP has been considered as a vital strategic instrument to contain China in the region. But on other hand China could also adopt "Carrot and Stick" policy to deal with the regional states. Diplomatically if China tries to have good relations with the regional states to make them away from Washington, then it would be carrot diplomacy. But China will not go on using too much carrot diplomacy and may adopt stick diplomacy to deter regional states from having close relations with US. The US is unable to provide appropriate and sufficient security goods in the South China Sea that would ultimately enable Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to collaborate with USA to cope with increasing Chinese dominance in the South China Sea. All four South East Asian claimant states need larger and well-trained forces to stop growing Chinese influence, maintain the balance of power and protect their exclusive economic zones which they lost to China. However, all four claimant states have jointly taken diplomatic stance in leading 2020 ASEAN conference by reiterating their belief in UNCLOS as the basis for the resolution of the South China Sea dispute.

While US is advancing its Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) and flight operations over the Chinese installments in the South China Sea causing protests by China. But despite all such activities by USA and its regional alliances China is still on the way of advancing its dominance in the South China Sea eroding US strategy and capability. According to structural realists China will continue to expand its dominance until it gains regional hegemony which could cause war. Both US and China could also be caught in the Thucydides Trap according to which China will try to replace US status of being superpower which could cause another nuclear war. Because according to Thucydides Trap a rising power ultimately tries to replace already existing hegemon maximizing the chances of conflict. So, it is still to be seen that how both major powers US and China escape from the Thucydides Trap in the South China Sea.

Looking towards the role of QUAD in the Indo-Pacific region that whether it is balancing power in the South China Sea or further escalating the conflict there.⁴ Quad is emerging as the most important actor which has caught the attention of the world in post covid-19 era. Quad

⁴ Amrita, "The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India" 21.

has the member states like Japan, India, Australia and USA. In this case Quad can be seen as the security alliance of 21st century. However, with the passage of time this security alliance may become a platform against the growing Chinese influence in the region. From Beijing's point of view Quad shows Cold War mentality when NATO was formed to contain USSR.

Quad may further complicate the situation in the South China Sea resulting in a major conflict rather than going towards the establishment of balance of power. China's relations with Quad member states have further worsened during covid-19 pandemic. But according to Quad member states this platform has been established to promote free trade maintain peace and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. China will continue to assert its influence in the region until it's opposed openly by Quad which will put all four Quad members in direct confrontation with China. So, Quad members will not take such a serious risk to face China directly which actually makes Quad future dark and hopeless.

If Quad members will go towards confrontation, then matter will be more serious resulting in the escalation of conflict in the South China Sea. In order to avoid Thucydides trap both China and US will have to avoid such groupings and regional claimant states should resolve their territorial disputes in the South China Sea by having bilateral negotiations with China. This is the only way forward to keep peace in the Indo-Pacific region otherwise there are the chances of conflict. However, it's also pertinent to mention that all member states of the South China Sea have overlapping interests in the Indo-Pacific region that's why China has always been trying to declare Quad as the Asian NATO.

But this grouping in itself is very weak due to divergent interests of the member states like for USA, the South China Sea and East China Sea are important just like Japan, for India the Quad is all about the Indian Ocean and for Australia it's all about Western Pacific. So, we can say that still there is no shared strategic interest of member states and consider the South China Sea as the secondary front to be countered which actually makes Quad a loose alliance. Hence, India may be aligning with other member states of Quad but will not take the risk of challenging China in the South China Sea which could escalate conflict there. Quad also held discussions in 2018 over the matter of offering an alternative regional economic infrastructure against China's multi-billion dollar OBOR initiative but so far there has been no apparent development over this issue. In order to deal with Quad member states' agenda to develop an alternative economic infrastructure against OBOR initiative China has announced that it will sign free trade agreements with more countries and will actively cooperate with all states and regions

that want to have such an ideal condition. In a nutshell we can assume that Quad has been established to kill two birds with one stone which includes not only to further economic interests in the region but also to counter the China in the South China Sea.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the growing US involvement in the regional affairs of the claimant states of the South China Sea is triggering security dilemma. As a consequence, China is becoming more assertive to prove his claim over the territory which it considers its part. China has indicated not only by words but also by actions that anything lying within the area of nine-dash lines belongs to him. China has spent massively on its People's Liberation Army Navy to further its interests in the South China Sea if not by carrots but by sticks. This is the reason that China has been encouraging the claimant states of the South China Sea to engage in bilateral talks to sort out outstanding issues over sovereignty claims there rather than involving external actors like US. China has warned ASEAN member states especially Philippines that if they will involve US in settlement of the regional affairs especially territorial claims in the South China Sea then consequences will be such not seen by any state before. Because for China in this 21st century South China Sea and Indian Ocean are just like Caribbean was for US in the beginning of 20th century. US became powerful by having influence over both Oceans like Atlantic and Pacific. Similarly, China wants control over the South China Sea as well as Indian Ocean to be regional hegemon. China has adopted the strategy of geo-economics and has started investing heavily in the regional states having deep seaports like Pakistan and Sri Lanka. While on the other hand US is focusing on engaging with the claimant states of the South China Sea by providing them with financial aid as well as military technologies to cope with increasing Chinese influence in the region. Both states are pursuing different strategies to achieve their ends in the region by utilizing all means and ways. According to US growing Chinese influence in the region is a bad omen and if it will continue to do so then it will be difficult to contain China later. But due to long distance and geographical hurdles it's going to

be a hectic task for US to contain China by relying on regional states which could be easily caught in the carrot diplomacy of China. In order to keep it smooth US has developed a regional alliance known as Quad to not only contain China with the help of Japan, India and Australia which are nearly in the neighborhood of China but also to exchange technologies and trade. But still Quad is far away from becoming a solid alliance to tackle China due to diverse interests of the member states. Although in 2018 in the meeting of Quad member states an agenda was discussed to establish an alternative economical infrastructure in the South China Sea region against China's OBOR initiatives. But still there is no apparent development over this. So, we can conclude that growing US involvement in the internal affairs of the claimant states of the South China Sea is going to play havoc with the stability of the region resulting in the escalation of the conflicts. Only China's proposed bilateral negotiations are a way forward to deal with the crisis in the South China Sea.

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