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US-China rivalry

A potential conflict?

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Abstract

The relations between the United States and China have in the recent years developed more and more towards an adversary relation that now has led to a rivalry. This rivalry has manifested itself on many occasions such as in the South China Sea, Taiwan strait. It has also led to economic competition that are affecting more and more countries around the world. In this thesis the aim is to figure out how the relation is evolving towards further confrontation. This will be solved with the use of economic and realist perspective from international relations.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
Research question	6
Methodology	6
Research Strategy	6
Multiple-case design	8
Research methods	9
Research criteria	10
Internal validity	10
External validity	10
Reliability	11
Choice of Theory	11
Theory	12
Offensive realism/Defensive Realism	12
Division of Labour theory	14
South China Sea	16
Taiwan	20
Microchips	24
Trade	26
Arctic	30
Analysis	33
Capabilities of China	34
Capabilities of the United States	35
Geopolitical analysis	36
Economic analysis	39
Discussion/Conclusion	40
References	41

Introduction

In this section multiple of the issues of the rivalry between the United States and China will be illuminated as it will introduce the problem and guide the reader through some of the core aspects of the rivalry.

The region of Asia and the Indo-Pacific is one of the most relevant continents of the coming time as the region is currently going through some of the most rapid developments both in terms of economic sense and geopolitical, as rivalries between former rivals is arising and dominating security politics in the area. The region has five states that is part of the 10 biggest economies in the world, United States, China, Japan, India, and South Korea (Kehlet & Christensen, 2022). Most of world trade flows through the Indo-Pacific and is especially crucial in terms of the global supply chain from technology such as electronic components, as Asia contains vital natural resources in the production of these technologies. In the last couple of years there has been seen disruptions in the global supply chain this has occurred due to corona outbreaks which affects the production of cars, aircrafts, and computers along with other electronic components (Smith, Cheng, Klinger, & Lohman, 2021).

The Asian region does inhabit some of the world's largest militaries China, United States, Russia, India, Pakistan Vietnam and both North and South Korea, and Japan, along with five nuclear armed states, United States, Russia, China, North Korea, India, and Pakistan. Geopolitically the security environment in Asia is quite complex and unstable due to many of the dispute's dates to the Second World War and the Cold War has never been solved. For instance, the China-Taiwan dispute that dates to the Second World War, and the Korean war also dates to the Cold War and both conflicts have never officially ended and developments in the conflicts is still active (Smith, Cheng, Klinger, & Lohman, 2021).

The rise of China has created implications on world politics especially the Asian region and the Indo-Pacific, as the rise of China has generated new alliances and shifted dynamics of the international system. This has shifted the attention of the United States from counterterrorism in the Middle East towards a graduate return of great power rivalry with China as was seen during the Cold War. As China currently is the second largest economy as it has the world's second largest gross domestic product and has considerably intertwined into the global supply chain for crucial technologies such as information and communications. Militarily China has also expanded its forces and has been undergoing a 20 year long modernization of its armed forces across all fields from the

conventional forces, space, cyber along with its nuclear forces (Cheng, 2021). China expects to be a fully modernized and have transformed its society in 2049, what they define as the “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. At this point the Peoples Republic of China predicts to be technological and its global influence is expected to be at par or even surpassed the United States in many fields (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021).

The rise of China has attracted the focus of the United States which increasingly has seen China as a competitor of the position as a leading superpower. The relations between the United States and China have deteriorated dramatically in the last many years and the two giants are now considering each other adversaries and rivals, this can be seen on multiple areas where the two is competing in areas evolving economics which contains aspects such as trade, resources and minerals, and production and manufacturing. The security political aspects ranging from the Taiwan dispute, the territorial claims of the South China Sea and East China Sea are some of the most relevant flashpoints that create instability and uncertainty to the surrounding region and threaten to draw other states into conflict.

Trade disputes and accusations of theft of property and Technology and unequal terms of trade has long been an issue for the US and has been hampering the US-China relation, and that led to former president Donald Trump launched a trade war against China in hopes of obtaining concessions from the Chinese communist party and today there are still major issues when dealing with trade, as restrictions have been put upon firms that have been accused of having direct ties to the government (Rudolf, 2020, p. 23-24). The two great powers are competing for the technological edge that would grant the future technology that would be decisive in an eventual confrontation between the PRC and the US. Currently the United States and the west have a technological advantage, but China is catching up and the intention is to surpass the US.

On the geopolitical stage as China has grown, they currently can back its claims with sufficient economic and military force, which has created issues with many of its neighbours including with the United States and its allies in the region. As China has rapidly increased its military capabilities to a point that can threaten the US military might in the Asia-Pacific, as they have surpassed the US in naval vessels, through its military modernization program, and has significant increased its inventory of different variants of cruise- and ballistic missiles along with the procurement of the Russian S-400 an anti-missile and anti-aircraft defence system (Cheng, 2021).

Close encounters by the Chinese and US navy have occurred multiple times, as China has built and militarized artificial islands upon reefs, which contains ports airfields and other military hardware, in what is officially international waters or claimed by neighbouring states among Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia. Neighbouring States has multiple times been harassed by Chinese naval ships as China continues to use its navy or coast guard in areas that is disputed to enforce its claims unilaterally. To resist the Chinese occupation of the area the US navy and US allies' navies regular conduct freedom of navigation operations through the disputed sea and past the artificial islands as a signal that the area is international waters (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 121).

The last couple of years the tensions around the Taiwan strait has intensified since to the election of Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Progressive Party in 2016 who is less China friendly, and its focus is orientated towards its relations with other states such as the United States and Japan rather than closer relations with mainland China. China views Taiwan as a break-away province which they intends to bring back to the fold, and because of the election of the less PRC friendly government, PRC suspended all interactions with Taiwan. Taiwan on the other hand perceive itself as a sovereign nation and does not share the view of the PRC. Due to Chinas capabilities has grown, Taiwan has bought more arms of defensive character from the United States as they have an unofficial alliance and defensive pact which, have angered China. President Xi has not excluded the use of force to reunite the island with mainland China, and further crated tensions between the United States and Taiwan and People's Republic of China on the other side (Smith, Cheng, Klinger, & Lohman, 2021).

These regions are not the only ones where there are contested claims, in the East China Sea the disputed island chain of the Senkaku's islands in Japanese or Diaoyutai islands in Chinese has also created tensions between Japan and the United States on one side and China on the other as the islands being administrated by Japan is claimed by China which has also created tensions between the different countries due to the use of naval ships and coast guard ships of the nations. The United States is drawn into due to the defensive treaties that exist between Japan and the United States (Smith, Cheng, Klinger, & Lohman, 2021).

These are some of the issues that dominates the US-China rivalry, and this leads up to the following question that this thesis will discuss, and the project will evolve around.

Research question

How does the current US-China rivalry evolve towards further confrontation between the two powers?

The purpose of this research question is to enlighten all the different perspectives of the US-China rivalry that will grant the widest and most explanatory power. The reason for choosing this research question and the US-China rivalry is based upon the huge importance and the potential importance it can have upon world politics both now and in the future. The competing relations affects the world economically, politically, and militarily as the two great powers have an immense influence in world politics and that affects all regions of the world. The rise of China has created an adversary relation as the United States perceive China as a peer competitor that may threaten the US power in the world. As the research question allude then, based on the tensions described in the introduction, then it is embedded in the research question that there exists a presumption, that increased confrontation will continue, and that the issues are not likely to be solved in the coming time due to the duration of many of the disputes and the distance between the different actors.

Methodology

In the following section the methodological considerations of this thesis will be underlined and be explained, and what it means for the thesis.

Research Strategy

In this section the perception of the rivalry will be described, as it is important for the reader how the rivalry is outlined as it determines both the design and the methods of the project. The type of study will be clarified and whether the study makes use of an inductive or deductive approach.

As the research question is formulated: *“How does the current US-China rivalry evolve towards further confrontation between the two powers?”*. Then the question is how is the best way

to approach this research question? Firstly, to determine the how the rivalry is progressing, it is important to map the perception of the rivalry. The perception and the understanding of the rivalry in this project is that it is a two-dimensional rivalry. This is understood in this perspective that it has three different layers, firstly there is the geopolitical aspects, secondly an economical aspect. All parts are intertwined and creates an understanding of the rivalry, whereas in each of every of the three aspects contains different disagreements and issues that has affected this rivalry. Some of these issues and disagreements is presented shortly and simplified in the introduction.

To be able to understand the rivalry and answer the research question the different aspects of the relation is needed to be outlined thoroughly, otherwise it is not possible to understand the complexity of the rivalry both due to the history and the many actors that are involved. a way to do this is by making use of different cases these would both generate the necessary knowledge about the US-China relations and the disagreements around it and create basis for analysing upon the data.

This will be researched based on multiple cases that will firstly enlighten the current tensions of the current rivalry. Secondly analyse why the actors do as they do, based upon closely selected theories. The cases are based upon two dimensions of the rivalry, the geopolitical perspective and the economic which all are interlinked, and which all supports the analysis in both understanding and explaining the rivalry between the United States and China. This includes the disputes around the South China Sea, and Taiwan, the interest around the arctic, the trade dispute, and the control of production of microchips. The cases represent at least one of the two main perspectives they are mostly interlinked, but in all they are part of bringing a holistic perspective of the rivalry.

In academic studies there usually are a differentiation between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. *Quantitative research* is mostly represented by researchers employing measurement and quantification of gathered data and mostly applies theory testing and deductive approach. While *qualitative research* is usually a strategy which emphasizes on words instead of quantification of data, and often relies upon an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. Mixed methods research is a mixture of both different strategies that combines the methods of both qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman, 2016, p. 31-34). This study makes use of the qualitative research but makes use of a deductive approach.

In research there exist a distinction between deductive and inductive studies, which is different ways of planning and organizing research. The *deductive* approach focuses on testing existing theories, through the establishment of a hypothesis and based on this the hypothesis can be confirmed or denied through empirical material. The *inductive* approach is on the contrary when the researcher based upon the empirical material finds pattern and conceptions and though these patterns of empirical findings the researcher creates a theory (Andersen, Binderkrantz, & Hansen, 2012). As mentioned before this thesis will make use of the deductive approach based of the research question, as the question points towards that the theories will be the determine factors to grant explanatory power around the rivalry between the US and China and why it evolves as it does.

Multiple-case design

In this section the multiple-case design will be described, the reason for the choosing it and the strengths and weaknesses of the design.

When it comes to research designs there exist different types which all shapes the project differently depending on the selection and the research question. As it is important to look at the research question and choose a design that gives the best opportunities to explore and obtain answers from the given field (Andersen, Binderkrantz, & Hansen, 2012). As mentioned above the selection design is the case design or the multiple-case design as this incorporates more cases. The selection of this design has been made based upon that decision to maximize the amount of information around the studied field. A case can be defined as a phenomenon that is delimited spatial, meaning the case can be anything from an event, a state, organization, person etc. (Andersen, Binderkrantz, & Hansen, 2012).

With the case study the case is the object of interest in which the researcher aims to provide an in-depth examination of the case. The multiple-case study is very close to the comparative case study, which entails studying of two or more contrasting cases with identical methods. To this, it implies that it is possible to better understand a phenomenon as the researcher is comparing more cases than only working with one. The multiple-case study occurs when the number of cases exceeds one. The strength of the multiple-case study is also that it grants opportunity to test those theories will hold a can be applicable to the cases (Bryman, 2016, p. 67).

This multiple-case design has been chosen as the design would contribute to

The weaknesses of case designs in general are that it is very difficult to generalize upon the findings of the cases therefore harming the external validity. But advocates for the different case designs points that due to the uniqueness of the cases then it is not the purpose to be able to generalize to other cases or populations as it attempts to explain something unique and that thing is not necessarily generalizable (Bryman, 2016, p. 64).

The cases that have been selected in this project are as mentioned all different cases that all reflect one small part of the relations between the United States and China. The cases have been closely selected due to the amount of information they could give, and where both parties are active, and a conflict of interest exist. In the methods the different cases will also be explored further and how they relate to the different theories.

Research methods

In this section the used methods of the project will be highlighted

The deductive approach will be used in this meaning, the theories will be able to grant explanatory power based on the different cases. The used theories that will have to grant data will be offensive and defensive realism from John J. Mearsheimer, and the development theory of the southeast Asia "The Division of Labour". The theories will be used to analyse the cases, which afterwards will be compared and discussed, to see if a shared pattern of behaviour comes forth through the analysis. The offensive and defensive realism will analyse both the disputes around the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the Arctic. The Division of Labour development model can give explanation towards the economic rise of China and the region of Southeast Asia. The first step is to gain the knowledge of how the different actors act. This will be done through the selected theories, as they can grant explanatory power towards why they act as they do and what it matters both in terms of the rivalry and the region also. Based on the data gain from the analyses the data will be discussed concluded from the data gained from this.

Research criteria

In the following section the different material used will be described, the research criteria will be presented, including internal validity, external validity, reliability. Every segment will be presented and being related to this paper.

Due to the fact this rivalry is still progressing and still developing now, then the material that has been used for the preparation of the cases has been based on reports, newspaper articles and academic journals. In terms of the used material then it is important to use material from both parties, therefore the use of sources has been from both the western medias and medias from China. But due to the language limitations of only knowing English, then it has had an impact on the amount of different Chinese newspapers.

Internal validity

This section the internal validity will be described and argued whether the internal validity is in order.

Internal validity reflects to whether the question of conclusion that incorporates a causal relationship holds water. Meaning if x causes y, can we be certain that it is x that affects y and not a different variable. Or if other variables are intervening and affecting the causality (Bryman, 2016, p. 41). The internal validity in this project is high this project is theory heavy where the variables will be given in advance. But on the other hand, since the thesis makes use of cases it affects the external validity.

External validity

In this section external validity will be explained and how this project's external validity.

The *external validity* reflects whether the result of the conclusions can be generalized beyond the specific research context (Bryman, 2016, p. 42). The external validity in case studies usually limited, as the rivalry between China and the United States is unique in this instance, but the multiple cases will increase the generalizability, but the fact that the different cases are not similar makes it hard to generalize based upon them.

Reliability

This section will firstly describe what reliability is and secondly describe whether this project's reliability is high or low.

Reliability reflects whether the results of the study are capable of being repeatable, and thereby coming to the same conclusions (Bryman, 2016, p. 41). In this thesis the study has a relatively high reliability, since it has all the cases written down and the project has not gathered data through for instance a survey or interviews. As with both interviews and surveys, the respondents can change the answer for the questions thereby not having the same prerequisites as the first time, which can affect the conclusions. The sources that have been used to generate the cases has also been from reports or reliable newspaper or journals, which means the only thing that can change is if some of the news articles are being edited. The reason for choosing the selected theories will be described in the next section, and the argumentation for why they fit well will also appear.

Choice of Theory

The argumentation of the three selected theories contribution to the project will appear in this section.

As mentioned, the analysis will be analysed through the three dimensions; the geopolitical/security political perspective, the economical perspective, and the ideological perspective.

The selection of the offensive and defensive realism is a great choice to be able to explain the geopolitical the behavioural reasons for why both China and the United States, furthermore the exceptional way to analyse the geopolitical tensions that happens at the regional level between the rivals both between the great power and a former regional hegemon, both why they happen and why the different parties act as they do in the given situation. This theory is great in analysing a great power rivalry between to great powers who is represented in two different continents, and how it matters in the context of the rivalry.

The division of labour development model is an economic development model that explains the economic growth of east Asia and China, and this is relevant for the insight of the region and to understand the region as it is very diverse. Which can also provide other perspectives to the rivalry.

Theory

In the following section the different theories will be presented, with their strengths and weaknesses also being reflected upon.

Offensive realism/Defensive Realism

This section will explain the neorealist theory offensive realism of John Mearsheimer.

Some of the basic assumptions and thoughts from the realist branch, has in principle a pessimistic view of human nature, as it has a conviction that international relations are conflictual and that conflicts in the international system are ultimately resolved by using force. This occurs as the values of the international system are dominated by national security and state survival, and a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics which is comparable to that in domestic life. A central assumption realists share, is the international system is anarchical, meaning there exist no overarching authority; there is no world government. The state act as the preeminent actor in the world, as international organisations, non-governmental organisation, and individuals are perceived unimportant or irrelevant (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, p. 70).

Humans through the realist thought are mostly characterized being preoccupied with the well-being of their own in the competitive relation towards each other, as they desire to be in the driver's seat and have the "edge" in relation to other people and countries in the international arena. Many *classical realists* such as Hobbes, Thucydides, and Machiavelli share the view that the international arena, that the acquisition and possession of power, development, and use of power are central elements of the political activity (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, p. 70).

The classical realist also believes that the main interest of foreign policy is to advance and defend the interest of the state. States are divided into hierarchy in the international system, with the most important states are the great powers. By realist international relation are understood as a struggle for domination and security between the great powers. Lesser and weaker states only adjust their policies and adapt their relations in response to the demands and expectations of the great powers thereby having a secondary role in the international system. The state is seen as a guarantee of a good life for its population, as it is the protector of the territory. *National interest* is essential factor in foreign policy making, and as all states pursue their national interest it is difficult for other states to trust or rely upon them. A *Balance of power* between great powers is seen by many realists as a way of limiting war, as when power faces power it creates order in the international sphere (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, pp. 70-71).

A different type of realist are the *neorealists*, the leading thinker is Kenneth Waltz who created the *Theory of International Politics*, which seeks to create a scientific explanation of the international system (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, p. 87), in this theory the focus is to explain the structure of the system, the interacting units also known as states, and the changes that happens in the system. According to Waltz all states has the same basic tasks in collecting taxes, maintains domestic order, and conducts foreign policy. The place it varies is the capabilities of the different states, as when there is an increase or fall in capabilities it reflects the international system and therefore changes in the system occurs. This can happen when a great power rises or falls then it changes the balance of power among the individual units in the system and perhaps changes the system from *bipolarity* to a *multipolarity* (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, p. 89). This means going from two great powers to three or more great powers in the system. A bipolarity is generally more stable than a multipolarity, as in the bipolarity there is only two great powers that are vying against each other, therefore they can keep each other in check. In a multipolarity there are more great powers and therefore it is difficult to keep an eye on each other and thereby miscalculation and mistakes can occur (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 3).

John J Mearsheimer built upon Kenneth Waltz's theory, but he refers to his theory as *defensive realism*, which means a state must seek power to be secure and safe but believes to excessive power will be counterproductive as other states would balance the powerful state, by increasing its military and alliance formation (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, p. 93).

Mearsheimer built his theory *Offensive realism* on Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* by expressing in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, that not only will the states seek power, but they will seek *hegemony* or to become a *hegemon*. To become a hegemon not only the state, seek to be the strongest great power, as all states seek to maximize their power. But instead, different great powers in the system will seek to become the only great power, meaning they increase their power at her expense of great powers in the system. Great powers will always try to change the distribution of power in their favour.

They do always have revisionist intensions, and if possible, they will do so unless the cost of doing so is too large. If the consequences upweights the gains, they will wait until they are in a more favourable position to do so (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 1).

A state will always attempt to obtain more power until the state is a hegemon. A state cannot become a global hegemon as the planet is too big as the oceans are too big to have a permanent presence there, but instead a state can become a regional hegemon. This means there always will be great power rivalry in the different regions, which either seek to change the distribution of power or thwart another great power attempt. Unless the great power is a hegemon then the no other state dare to oppose them due to their military might (Mearsheimer, 2001). The theory *Offensive realism* is therefore that great powers will always seek to gain more power with hegemony as a goal.

One of the weaknesses of the Offensive realism is that the theory for instance does tell the difference between the power relationship with western Europe and the US and Asia and the US. This is some of the issues as it does not consider historical account where the theory cannot explain the cases (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019, pp. 94-95).

Division of Labour theory

This section will describe the development model that contributed to the development of Asia and China.

The division of labour or “the flying-geese model was initiated in the 1930s by the Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu, the point of the plan was speed up the development of the surrounding territories, this was in the first wave carried out through the Japanese conquests of the region under the cover of a “Greater East Asian Co-Property Sphere” that should develop the surrounding area. This was stopped by the defeat of the Second World War. with help of American capital and technology Japan industrialized again, and with help of the United States a second version of the “Greater East Asian Co-Property Sphere” with the intention of creating deeper economic integration in East Asia (Xing, 2007).

The development can be seen in waves and four industrialization waves as Japan was seen as a model imitation, they learned the development model from Japan was: low wages, good education and training, high savings rates, and strong government guidance of the private economy. There were three elements that was based upon the Japanese model. The first one was a development of a highly competitive manufacturing sector. The second was er deliberately restructuring of industry towards which had a high-value and high- productivity. The third element was an aggressive domestic and international business strategy (Xing, 2007).

As Japan entered a later stage of development, they passed the earlier phase to the next NIEs (newly industrialized economies) who transferred their earlier stage of production on to other countries and in turn. In East Asia there exist strong differences in the allocation of the natural resources and industrialization. Some countries which are industrially powerful are resource-poor, while some resource-rich countries are industrially weak. Among the industrialized countries the level of industrialization does also vary as some are more advanced than others. Division of labour has in East Asia been structured both vertically and horizontally. The vertical labour division explains that the advanced economies are host countries for high-tech industries, but the less developed economies are suppliers of cheap labour and resources. The horizontal labour division indicate that the shedding effects from advanced economies can be a helping input for the less developed economies in form of foreign direct investment, technology transfer in different forms and international subcontracting (Xing, 2007).

There exist four stages of the chain-pattern of production relations: 1. Early stage (food processing, textile, and leather products); 2. Middle stage (non-metallic minerals, rubber products, wood products, chemical and petroleum refining, etc.); 3. Late state (clothing, basic house

electronics, capital and intermediate goods); 4. High-tech stage (biology, information technology, hi technology and material sciences) (Xing, 2007).

In the 1990s a flying-geese model was slowly being replaced by a new phenomenon called “bamboo capitalism” also called parallel development. And instead of only focussing on the vertical model, towards horizontal model of foreign direct investment played a key role that also created intra-regional production networks but also has a focus on the exchange of parts, and different products. The large size of the country along with the unbalanced development levels inside the country, therefor China can trade with all countries nevertheless of development levels (Xing, 2007). In the next section the different cases that will be used for the analysis will be presented.

South China Sea

This section will present the issues that exist and develops around the South China sea.

The dispute around the South China Sea is one of the most serious of the political conflicts between the United States and China, and a conflict that could lead to a direct confrontation between the two great powers. The conflict evolves around the fact that multiple states; Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, or Vietnam all have territorial claims of the island reefs in the south China Sea, China has also claimed the specific area (Mastro, 2020).

Since the 1970s the states mentioned above did all claim various parts of the South China Sea, as the area is rich of natural resources and is strategically important in terms of economic traffic that flows through the area. The South China Sea is estimated to contain 11 billion barrels of untapped oil, 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and large fishing areas (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Since 2009 China has advanced its territorial claims in the South China Sea through increased presence, this has been done though a various tactics such as reclaiming land, militarizing islands it claims (Mestro, 2020). This has antagonized the different other states that also are claiming the area, and this had led to multiple standoffs between different naval units along with civilian vessels. China has also increased its military force in the area and mentioned before militarized reefs and Paracel and Spratly islands (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Satellite images has proven and been showing pictures of Chinas efforts to reclaim the islands by increasing sizes of existing island and creating new entirely. China has constructed ports, military installations, and airstrips, particularly on the Paracel and Spratly islands, where twenty and seven outposts respectively has been created along with the deployment of fighter jets, cruise missiles and a radar system on Woody Island. China claims that the territory inside the South China Sea is rightly theirs and therefore under international law, foreign militaries are not able to conduct intelligence-gathering activities, such as reconnaissance flights, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

The United States considers the right to for claimant countries under the UN Convention of the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) to move freely through the EEZ and are not required to notify other claimant nations of its military activities.

In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at Hague issued its ruling upon a claim brought against China by the Philippines under UNCLOS, ruling in favour of the Philippines in almost every account. Even though China has signed the treaty they refuse to accept the court's authority (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

To challenge China and its claiming of the South China Sea, the United States have routinely increased its military presence in the area during freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) to protect its political, economic and security interests and support Asian allies in the region (Council on Foreign relations, 2021). In 2018 and 2019 during the Trump administration the US navy vessels sailed closer to the occupied islands and more frequently in the area compared to the during the tenure of President Obama. Today the US continues to operate and do FONOPS in the Exclusive economic Zone of China, which is allowed under international law, even though China is trying to exercise control of military activities (Mestro, 2021).

The Chinese coastguard has on multiple instances hindered other claimants in exercising their right by harassing vessels in the area. For instance, Chinese vessels of the coastguard was in May 2019 sent to intimidate Vietnamese offshore support vessels that were servicing a drilling platform in an area Vietnamese identify as territorial waters. This led to the most significant standoff between Vietnamese and Chinese coastguard vessels in five years. The same has happened towards a Malaysian oil rig in the last couple of months. Mike Pompeo has also stated that the US was read to defend the Philippines in case of any aggression from China if it was to happen (Mestro, 2021).

The latest in regard of the situation is evolving around the South China Sea, is that the Philippines is blaming China for using fishing vessels as a cover for building new island in the disputed areas next to the coast of the Philippines. As more than 200 hundred vessels have been lined up around the reef, the Philippines suspect that the vessels are controlled militias rather than civilian crews and have been there in the last couple of weeks and have been spotted during patrols (Lendon, Philippines says illegal structures found on reefs near where Chinese boats gathered, 2021).

The concerns from the Philippines are that they fear its part of a new phase of construction to further cement their position in the area. Since the ships are anchored with military precision the Philippines believes it is not a coincidence, they are there at this time. The Chinese ships have been floating around the reef for a while and the authorities of the Philippines says that China in secrecy is building different structures on the Union Banks Reef which is situated more than a thousand kilometres away from the Chinese mainland (Kruse, Kina har bygget hemmelige »strukturer« på havet. Nu slår nabolandet alarm, 2021).

The Union Bank reef is part of the Spratly Islands archipelago which China has built fortifications on in the past. As mentioned before the Permanent Court of Arbitration at Hague had earlier in 2016 rejected the Chinese claims in the area but China dismissed the refusal of its claims.

As China has been accused of using its massive fishing fleet as a means for asserting its territorial claims in the South China Sea. The government of China has refused that it is using the fishing fleet as an irregular naval force or a maritime militia, and postulates that the accusations are groundless. And instead, they are saying that the ships were there to take shelter from the wind. The Philippines has had showed videos and images of the ships, which the Chinese claim was made on March 27, but images from the Philippines goes back to March 7 and still shows the ships in the lagoon (Lendon, Philippines says illegal structures found on reefs near where Chinese boats gathered, 2021).

With the fishing fleet still present China is still denying the existing of a so called “maritime militia” and its connection to the People’s Liberation Army, which it has been referred to by many western analysts and journalists. With the western experts saying the “maritime militia” is directly funded and serves as part of the military to exert its territorial claims in the area (Lendon, Beijing has a navy it doesn't even admit exists, experts say. And it's swarming parts of the South China Sea, 2021).

Many experts also point out that the vessels cannot be challenged without a direct confrontation as multiple of the fishing vessels are armed with machine guns making them effective at close range and reinforced hull while also having a far larger engine than regular fishing vessels. In western circles there seem to be no ambiguity whether it is part of the PLA, as Pentagon calls them People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia. The fishing vessels is armed with machine guns and reinforced and has the capacity to out speed 90 percent of regular fishing vessels. The purpose of the Maritime Militia is subverting other nation's sovereignty and enforce unlawful claims (Berger, Gilday, & Schultz, 2020, p. 3).

The Maritime Militia is said to be part of the Chinese fishing fleet which is the largest in the world and consist of 187.000 vessels but the number of those who are armed is unclear. The use of fishing vessels to occupy an area and thereafter fortify it has been seen before. When China took control of the Mischief Reef in 1995 and Scarborough Shoal in 2012 from the Philippines it happened in a similar manner (Lendon, Beijing has a navy it doesn't even admit exists, experts say. And it's swarming parts of the South China Sea, 2021).

With the Philippines having protested and demanding the vessels moves away from its territorial waters, but the vessels is still present and is not moving away. As a result of the escalation in the South China Sea, and the increased presence of naval vessels and fishing vessels for military use, the US and the Philippines are preparing for joint drills in the South China Sea. With the Liaoning moving into the South China Sea because of the US navy conducting exercises in the South China Sea. As a US navy expeditionary force were concluded its naval exercises in the area, led by and aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt along with some support ships (Lendon, US and China deploy aircraft carriers in South China Sea as tensions simmer, 2021).

Further developments around the South China Sea is that the Philippine president has warned China that if they are drilling for oil and minerals in the disputed area around the Whitsun Reef, then the Philippines are forced to send military vessels to defend its claim in the area, he has also commented that he is not interested, if China are fishing in the area as the quantities of fish is too small to quarrel about (South China Morning Post , 2021). He also commented that if he is to challenge China around the disputed waters then it is likely to lead to violence. He has earlier tried to improve the relations with China and was promised billions of dollars of investments and loans, which yet has not materialized itself. He has also been powerless to confront China in the area, and he has also said multiple times that challenging China could risk a war, which the Philippines would

lose. The United States have aired its concerns around the “Maritime militia” around the Reefs and have been backing its long-time ally the Philippines in the matter. Duterte also commented that if the Philippines was to initiate a war with China, then the US would not join (South China Morning Post, 2021).

The increased tensions between the different states around the South China Sea has also attracted the attention of the Europeans, as in the last couple of years more European powers such as France and Great Britain have sent naval vessels to patrol in the area as they would like to keep the strait open for access. As the European powers of France, Germany and Britain is supporting the Hague tribunal ruling (Zhang, 2021).

As a result of the increasing military involvement of the different powers, Japan have sold military ships and military equipment to both the Philippines and Vietnam, to better to be able to react to the threat of the Chinese presence and deter any aggression from them (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Taiwan

In this section the developments and issues around Taiwan will be presented that is tarnishing the relations between both Taiwan and China and China and the United States.

The issue around the South China Sea is not the only instance where the United States and China have political and security interest that contradicts. The relations between Taipei and Beijing have in the recent years deteriorated significantly especially since the election of Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as she opts for an official independence from Peoples Republic of China. In the years before the president, Ma Ying-jeou who was elected in 2008 from the Kuomintang party was a candidate that were more positive towards Mainland China and sought to improve the relations between mainland China and Taiwan through cooperation, this was done through economical agreements (BBC, 2021).

The entire conflict arises from the Chinese civil war when the defeated Chiang Kai-shek and the remnants of the Kuomintang (KMT) government fled to Taiwan with the help of the US navy. China has always viewed Taiwan or the Republic of China as a break-away province from China, and has many times said that Taiwan will never achieve official independence. Taiwan on the other hand has always insisted and viewed itself as an independent state since 1949 (ritzau/Reuters , 2021).

Even though the two parties agreed upon a consensus in 1992 of a one China principle two systems framework, which they both agree that Taiwan belong to China. But the issue is that they are both viewing their political system as the legitimate system of China, and therefore interpreting the consensus differently. Today the KMT still accepts the 1992 Consensus as a starting point for further negotiation, but the current president Tsai Ing-wen from the DPP who was elected in 2016 has refused this consensus as she strives for an “official” independence (Albert, 2020).

The US role in this conflict is that the US was supporting the KMP during the Second World War and has done ever since. With the establishment of formal diplomatic relation with Beijing in 1979 the US signed a joint communique stating that the United States of America acknowledges that there is only one China. This led to the termination of the official relation to the republic of China Taiwan, but instead the US opened unofficial ties with Taiwan through the Taiwan Relations Act, that affirmed important unofficial relations with Taiwan. The legislation allowed the arms sales to Taiwan for self-defence and not rejecting the notion that the US would defend Taipei in a case of attack from China (Albert, 2020).

The arms sales have from 2007-2018 risen to 25 billion dollars, and this has led to US-China friction along with friction across the strait. Before the inauguration of Donald J. Trump, the telephonic conversation between Donald Trump and Taiwan’s Tsai spoke and therefore he was the first president to have high-level contact between the states. During the Trump administration the relations with Beijing continued to suffer, as the US proposed multiple new arms deals to Taiwan and unveiled a new 250-million-dollar complex for a de facto embassy in Taipei (Albert, 2020).

The Chinese government proclaimed in Beijing has also forced international companies to list Taiwan as a part of China and failing to comply Beijing would threaten to block them from the Chinese market. When the Hong Kong protests and unrests happened in 2020 the leaders in Taipei were worried that the same treatment would occur to them, especially when the national security law was enacted it uneased the government in Taiwan. But when the US sent their highest-ranking politician to Taiwan to hold meetings and guarantee the commitment to Taiwan (BBC, 2021).

It infuriated China who strongly opposed the American meeting and threatened that any further support of the independence of Taiwan would severely damage the relations between the US and China. During the Visit of the American politician, China conducted a live-fire military

exercise in the strait that separates mainland China and Taiwan as a response. After the inauguration of Joe Biden as president a large incursion of Chinese fighters was intercepted by Taiwanese fighters while deployed air defence missile systems to monitor the situation. After this the US president Joe Biden backed that the US support for Taiwan is rock solid (BBC, 2021), (ritzau/Reuters, 2021).

The tensions seem to be increasing as a Chinese carrier group is exercising both to the west and the east of Taiwan and is viewed as a warning for the government in Taiwan. During the exercise multiple different fighters of the People's Liberation Army entered the Taiwanese self-declared air defence identification zone, and in the following days the People's Liberation Army was also putting pressure on Taiwan by sending 15 fighters inside the Air defence identification zone. The US showed up with a guided missile destroyer and sailed through the Taiwanese strait to show its support to Taiwan and the protect a free and open Indo-Pacific (London, China flanks Taiwan with military exercises in air and sea, 2021). The navy also added earlier that this kind of exercise was to become a regular thing as Beijing was to enhance its capability to safeguard national sovereignty, safety, and development interests (Reuters, 2021).

This is confirmed as China again in between seven days again made incursions into the ADIZ of Taiwan, this time it consisted of the highest number of fighters in a year, as 25 fighters of those included 18 fighter jets, four nuclear-capable bombers, two anti-submarine aircraft and an early warning aircraft. Taiwan dispatched fighter jets to warn of the Chinese fighters and deployed missile systems while monitoring them, as a standard response as China has been active in the South China Sea and the in the southern part of Taiwan in the last month (McDonell, 2021). This tendency is becoming more regular as reports of the Taiwanese ministry of national defence shows that air activities from the southwestern part of the ADIZ has regularly been contested and been violated by fighters from the PLA, but the number of aircraft is not a regular thing as it usually consists of a couple of aircrafts as the ministry since September has kept track of the activities (Ministry of National Defence R.O.C, 2021).

The latest set of naval drills outside of Taiwan, comes from what Beijing calls American provocations, as the US secretary of State had pronounced that the United States have an obligation to make sure Taiwan can defend itself, and pointed out that it would be dangerous to change the existing status quo with power. China has been showing the US and Taiwan that they

shall not threaten to cross its red lines, and the most important one is about the independence of Taiwan (Winther, 2021).

President Xi Jinping has earlier in a speech vowed that Taiwan will never formally become an independent nation and did not rule out the use of force to guarantee that the island would be incorporated into mainland China. The tensions around Taiwan had increased further due to Taipei garnered further support from the US in the form of new military hardware, and an agreement between the US and Taiwanese coastguard and further guarantees from US president Biden (Lendon, China flanks Taiwan with military exercises in air and sea, 2021).

The president of Taiwan has also earlier said that Taiwan does not need to declare its independence as it already is an independent nation with a constitution, a military, and democratically elected leaders (McDonell, 2021).

With the US secretary of State Antony Blinken also earlier guaranteed that the US along with Japan would push back against Chinese threats to stability and order in East Asia (Yeung, 2021).

Both the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning and its sister ship Shandong have carried out drills before and sailed close to the Taiwanese island. The Chinese has used these tactics in the form of naval drills before to put pressure upon the Taiwanese government. As the in December 2019 before the presidential and parliamentary election China used Shandong to sail through the Taiwanese strait, which Taiwan condemned as intimidation. With Taiwan being viewed as the most sensitive territorial issue and is by many viewed as a potential flashpoint. With the imminent threat posed by China the Taiwanese president is overseeing a revamp of the island's military, with equipment as stealth corvettes capable of taking out aircraft carriers (Reuters, 2021). In the next section how the competition of technology and the production of the newest hardware will be touched upon.

Microchips

The competition between the United States and China has also moved into the high-tech department as they are fighting for control for the future technologies.

The conflict and the tensions between China and Taiwan have only risen in step with the rise of China and the rise of capabilities and in the same way has the rivalry between China and the United States. As mentioned before in the upper part of the section, then this growing rivalry has not only materialized itself in the geopolitical positioning of the two powers the rivalry has also extended itself to trade and technology. With the two powers fighting to secure the future technologies that can give one of the two the edge technology wise.

This race and struggle have now come to microchips, they are known as the brains of computers, smart-tv's, tablets and cars. As part of the ongoing trade war between the US and China, the US would try to limit the access of the newest microchips for China as this has been moved towards a sensitive field of American policy (Winther & Kruse, 2020). The blacklisting of Chinese companies was there for a part of this, as a mean to limit the Chinese access to American produced microchips and happened after the Huawei's attempts to expand into the different telecommunications networks of many western countries.

The issue with this is that China currently is depended upon the US or US allied countries when it comes to the microchips. With this conflict China and the United States will do all in its power to become independent when it comes to the production of the microchips, as there currently is a mistrust towards the chips that is produced from China, as the west fear that the technology can be used to obtain information around the critical important information about the western states (Winther & Kruse, 2020).

As a part of the decoupling of the microchips the US uses its position to be able to deny China access to the critical parts of the production of the chips. As the production of the components for the microchips is spread out in different countries the US is using its power to persuade the different countries to exclude China the access to the technology to limit China's technological development. One of these cases where the great powers are trying to use its influence can be seen in the Netherlands in the company called ASML. ASML is a company which almost have monopoly on a small but a decisive part of the production of the more advanced microchips.

The issue was that the company needed investment to be able to produce the newest parts of microchips through a process called lithography (Reuters, 2020).

Due to the lack of funds for the new machines that produce the newest microchips a supplier from China was ready to buy the production and the technology. The White House and former secretary of state Mike Pompeo warned and emphasized the Dutch government and Prime Minister Mark Rutte, that it would be dangerous to sell the newest technology to China as it would enhance the development of the newest electronic devices along with military hardware in the process. After receiving a report that stated the dangers of selling to China, the Dutch were hesitant to allow the last export licenses to the customer from China, it has been reported that the customer was Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC), who is the biggest China's biggest chip-making specialist (Reuters, 2020).

China has also been accused of trying to steal parts of the technology from ASML in a spy operation of theft of intellectual copyrights by former employees from San Jose in California. It was later revealed that the some of those who was involved was Chinese nationals with links to the ministry of science and technology in Beijing. This reveal has also influenced the decision not to give the license to the SMIC for the purchase (Baazil, 2020). The only companies that can produce the newest microchips are the American Intel Corp, the South Korean Samsung Electronics, Taiwan's TSMC and ASML in the Netherlands. China is investing massively into the field as it is on the national agenda to be able produce the newest microchips (Reuters, 2020).

The fact that many of the companies that is producing the different microchips is situated in states that are allied to the United States, which makes it easier for the US to control or at least affect and thereby limit China's access to the new microchips and therefore making the sanctions very effective. This has led Huawei into a regular crisis as they find it difficult to obtain the different components which is needed for their products. With the leading producer of the microchips TSMC which is in Taiwan and has a global market share of 55 percent, and if you need processors for data centres, artificial intelligence, and smartphones then you are forced to buy them from TSMC as there exist no alternative (Winther & Kruse, 2020).

They are also ready to produce the newest generation of microchips as TSMC is building one of the most expensive factories, that shall produce the newest generation of chips.

These is going to be the most compact microchips as the thickness is three nanometres, and will be used for everything from fighter jets, medical supplies, smartphones, and cars. With the US and China following the development of these microchips with interest. The US has used its massive influence on the island to force TSMC cancel deliveries to Huawei which has angered Beijing (Kruse, 2021).

Due to the growing tensions between China and Taiwan, some analyst fear that in the future that China would invade Taiwan both due to the political relations between the countries, but also the desire to gain access to the newest microchips could also accelerate the process. This would dramatically worsen the relationship between the two competing rivals and probably spark a war between them, with Admiral Phillip Davidson, the supreme commander of the pacific fleet predicting that China would be able to have the capabilities to conquer Taiwan before five years (Kruse, 2021). It is not only microchips both parties are having controversies around, trade is another issue that also is worsening the relation between them.

Trade

With the meteoric rise of China both economically, militarily, and technologically, trade between the US and China has evolved from being reciprocal beneficial to become a competition orientated.

The rivalry in the economic sense in not only limited to industrial competition, but it also includes the position and status as the leading global economic and trading power. In purchasing power parity. China has already exceeded the American and is now world largest economy in that sense. And at market prices China's gross domestic product shows the largest gross fixed capital formation and the largest industrial value creation. China has exceeded the United States and in absolute terms in being the largest exporter the largest trading nation and is also the largest contributor to world economic growth. Some prediction says if the current growth rates of the Chinese economy continue to be the same, then China is likely to replace the United States as the world's largest economy (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 26).

During the regime of Xi Jinping in China the influence exerted on the economy by the communist party and the state has increased and exercise of power has also driven towards a more authoritarian and doctrinal. The Chinese economical is there for viewed as a politically, authoritarian, mercantilist state capitalist system (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 26).

As a reaction to the stricter control of the Chinese economy, the American trade policy has also witnessed a politically turn towards protectionism. This means that the American trade policy today no longer is based upon the principles of “free trade” but instead it has drifted towards “fair and reciprocal” trade, and during the Trump presidency the focus on bilateral trade balances was key. Former president Donald Trump, casted away the common established practises of trade theory and empirical experiences of trade policy, and instead the focus of his policies was “America first”. Thereby prioritizing the US interests above the obligations deriving and international treaties and multilateral rules. This has been seen in multiple instances where he has shown no qualms in imposing unilateral protectionist measures to exert pressure upon trade partners (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 26).

In his efforts to achieve the interest of the US, Donald Trump accepts erosion or even destruction of international norms and international rules, he sees it as a price worth paying this could be seen in his withdrawal of the World Trade organization, Council of Human rights of the UN, and the World Health Organization. With trade policy a central issue for Trump in the relation with China, and the interest here is not only in domestic value creation and employment, but also the overarching category of national security. The interests of Washington lie in protecting the US and ensuring the strategic national industries to possess supply chains that are independent of Chinese influence as competition between the two powers increase (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 26-27).

The competitive challenge which China poses to the US has now also extended from the low manufacturing level to being extended into the high-tech sphere. In the “Made in China 2025” industrial policy, China strives to develop a high-tech industry, as Beijing have ambitions of achieving the global market leadership in ten key high-value-added sectors. Also, today the Chinese and American companies are in a fierce competition in the fields of communications technologies and for artificial intelligence for the lead both in development, setting standards and systems. This competition has decreased the profits of American companies due to administrative restrictions to the Chinese market are increasing. many branches in which the US businesses possess competitive advantages remain closed for them. As a result, the United States have become reluctant to transfer technology (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 25).

The US has recognized that the increased competition in the field of economics and technology with its strategic rival China will only benefit and accelerate the rise of China by economic exchange. And Donald Trump believes that the modernization of the Chinese people's Liberation Army can be in many ways be halted by decoupling the two economies (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 27).

The United States and the west accuse China of unfair competition, for instance by closing its markets with protectionist measures, discriminating against foreign suppliers, and exerting direct and arbitrary influence on markets and crucial businesses, along with subsidizing the Chinese companies to grant them massive competitive advantages (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 27).

During the Trump presidency in 2017 the United States launches a trade war in a hope to decouple the economies by putting increased tariffs on imports from China and greatly restricting Chinese investments to the American market especially in the security-relevant sectors of the economy, further restricting the technologies departing from the US to China; due to stricter controls from the Department of Commerce, banning Huawei and other Chinese firms; which are listed on Department of Commerce's "Entity list" from making investments in the US, along with the restrictions of Chinese telecommunication and visual surveillance in the US (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 27).

The Chinese countermeasures had been comparatively restrained so far, due to the lack of will of further infuriating the conflict, due to the fear of an even a stronger reaction from the Trump presidency. Though the response of China of tariffs on imports from the US has been reciprocal to the American, China has also reduced the tariffs on imports from third states, and thereby having the effect of disadvantaging the imports from the United States. The Chinese businesses are also actively substituting the suppliers to limit the American imports. Beijing had considered placing an export embargo on rare earths, which China is having a dominant position on this resource market (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 27). With Huawei entering the Entity list, China's response had been to create its own "Unreliable Entity list" with all businesses, organizations and individuals that comply with the US boycotts, those on this list would be disadvantaged on the Chinese market. During the same time Chinese consumers were also calling for boycotts of goods from the United States (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 27).

Even though the two parties did sign a Phase One Agreement 2019. The agreement settled some of the differences but is not enough to resolve all the current differences around economy and trade which also means that the newly elected president Biden will have to negotiate it in 2021 or later. The agreement included, that China and the United States would renounce the announced increase in special tariffs and China promised to increase its imports of US goods amounting to 200 billion dollars for the years 2020 and 2021. China did also promise it would improve the protection of intellectual property, an end the forced technology transfer and enable better market access in financial services (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 28).

As mentioned before this was only some of the disagreements the great powers must resolve, subjects as subsidies, state enterprises and technology are disputes which are left untouched along with the tariffs of the first round is also still in effect. The newly elected president of Joe Biden is likely to confront China towards its economic policies and his hopes is that he can create a more equal trade relation with the help of fellow democracies of Europe, Japan, and other Asian states. He is also likely to confront China with all means possible to follow its obligations from the Phase One Agreement, as China currently has not stopped the forced technology transfer, the illicit procurement of American intellectual property, and the import of 200 billion of dollars of American goods have still not been bought (Lee, 2021).

The Biden administration has done a thoroughly review of the US trade policies towards China and has made the forced labour camps of the Uighur Muslims one of his top priorities as the Human rights aspect is a central element in the Biden administration, this perspective will also be described later in a later section around the political differences. Another priority is also the American access to the Chinese market, which is met with market barriers along with government subsidies (Lee, 2021).

How the rivalry has affected the two states' orientation towards the arctic will be presented in the next section.

Arctic

The interest of the two giants economically and geopolitically towards the arctic will be proven here.

It is not only in the Indo-Pacific where the US-China rivalry is present and where it has conflicting interests as in the Arctic region the two great powers have also increased its influence in the last couple of years. In the last couple of years there have been an increased military build-up in the arctic region, which could jeopardize the regions low security tensions which have affected the region in many years (Patey, 2020, p. 2). With the growing military built up in the in the arctic as Russia is rearming its bases and increasing its forces in the region as the ice in the region is slowly melting and allowing further movement through the Northeast passage as it has largest and most populated area in the arctic region, as Russia is preparing itself for the future in which much of the ice is predicted to be gone and therefor making the waters more navigable. China has also shown interest into the arctic region as China has strategic interests in the Arctic area. In 2018 China published its arctic strategy, in this China declared that it perceives itself as a near arctic state, due to its major interests in the region. With the US calling it absurd as China does not have any arctic possessions and that China is situated 3000 km away from the Arctic region (Lino, 2020).

Since becoming an observer nation in the arctic council in 2013, the interest for the arctic region derives from the opportunity of getting access to the large and untouched and unexplored quantities of resources below the ice and ocean floor. As the ice is melting it is generating new possible trade routes, which China wants to take advantage of as it wants to create a Polar Silk Road, through the Northeast passage, it would reduce the transport time from China to Europe. China has also built ice-capable cargo ships and icebreaker ships, as the goal for China is to be able to use northern route regularly as the transportation distance from Shanghai to German ports would be reduced by 4600 km instead of transporting the goods through the Suez Canal (Lino, 2020).

China has invested heavily in projects in nearly every Arctic country. Russia is one of these countries China has invested in, and here China has invested billions into extracting energy sources from beneath the permafrost in the northern parts of Russia. With both Russia and China both invested into ice-capable LNG tanker ships to be able to transport the energy. The global warming has also affected the arctic region as new possibilities of fishing, mining, petroleum, and shipping into areas which before was inaccessible. It has been estimated that the Arctic holds

approximately 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil – which is around 13 percent of global estimates – and contain 30 percent of the undiscovered natural gas of the world (Lino, 2020). The Arctic regions contain some of the largest occurrences of minerals and uranium, some of these minerals is the REE or rare earth elements and these minerals present in the southern part of Greenland (Kruse, Både Kina og USA stirrer stift på valget i Grønland. Årsagen ligger dybt i fjeldet, 2021).

China has advanced its presence in the Arctic by building research vessels and by building research stations in both Norway and Iceland. The different Arctic nations including the US have been monitoring the developments of China as it has expanded its Arctic interests and capabilities. Denmark has expressed its concerns as China has shown interest in Greenland, which is an autonomous territory, but with Denmark handling the foreign, security, and defense policies. China having proposed establishing a research station, a satellite ground station, to renovate and built new airports in Greenland and expand exploration for minerals and buying former naval bases in Greenland (Lino, 2020).

With the help of the US, the response to the buying an old military base in Greenland from China was prevented as the US would see it dangerous to have Chinese warships or submarines in the arctic or Atlantic Ocean. Washington also encouraged Denmark to refuse China from investing into building new airports in Greenland, with Washington guarantying to provide funding for the airports as they could be used for both civilian and military purposes. Ultimately Denmark funded the construction of the airports instead of Chinese investments. But the most European and Arctic states have been cautious when allowing Chinese investments deals towards ports and infrastructure projects as they have seen the risks it presents for them (Lino, 2020).

The US has been cautious when countering China in the arctic, as mentioned before they have advised allied countries from allowing Chinese investments in the Arctic especially strategic infrastructure which can be used for military purposes. With the US having a military listening post in the Thule Air Base from the Cold war, which is used to detect missiles coming from Russia as they must fly above the Arctic to be able to hit the East coast of the US.

Otherwise, then that the US did criticize China at an Arctic Council meeting in May 2019, while the AS have invested into a new Joint Command in Norfolk, Virginia, in which the focus will be focused on the North Atlantic. The co-located, revived US 2nd Fleet will be focused on

the Arctic, with the aim of the fleet is to defend the US interests in the North Atlantic and in the Arctic region (Lino, 2020).

With the US policy is directed into preserving its influence in the Arctic this was followed up with the several naval exercises in the Arctic region for the first time in decades. With a US carrier strike group, including a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, becoming the first strike group to operate into the arctic since 1991, and the same strike group to participate in the Norway-hosted NATO exercise Trident Juncture in October-November, which was the largest since the end of the Cold War. Another carrier strike group also conducted the US exercise Northern Edge at Alaska for the first time in a decade (Lino, 2020).

The 2017 US National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defence Strategy raised the strategic competition with China and Russia by declaring them revisionist powers, while also elevating the great power competition into the regional governance frameworks of the Arctic Council. This happened when US secretary of state, Mike R. Pompeo at the Arctic Council accused China of performing aggressive behaviour that threatens the Arctic, while also accusing Russia's illegitimate claims over the Northern Sea Route and the threats of using military force destabilize the Arctic (Anthony & Klimenko, 2021).

As a near-term priority the US has allowed the US Coast Gard to be equipped to be capable of operating in the arctic, while also funding for new ice-breaker ships that should be deployable for the US Coast guard in 2029. The need for enhanced military cooperation between allies along with fellow arctic States such as Sweden and Finland have also been stressed. With both the number and complexity of bilateral and multilateral training and exercise to enhance interoperability and common tactics, and procedures for the extremely cold weather has increased. Even though the US military activities in the Barents and the Bering Sea have increased, the strategic outlook from the US navy for the Arctic is still perceived and characterized as a low-tension area. The newly formed US strategy explained targeted the strategic rivals in (Anthony & Klimenko, 2021).

The resources that is present in the underground in Greenland and in the Arctic, itself plays a large part of how the great powers in the United States and China acts. As mentioned above Greenland have revealed to contain two of the largest deposits of REE in in the world, Kvanefjeld and Kringlerne, and both China and the United States are monitoring the situation as in Greenland the mining projects awaits permission from the Greenlandic government (Kalvig & Lucht, 2021).

After China's attempt to buy and invest in the infrastructure in Greenland, the US have stepped up its investments with the former US president Donald Trump proposing the unconventional and failed attempt to buy Greenland from Denmark which ended in a minor diplomatic crisis. Since then, the US have established a Consulate in Nuuk in which three diplomats are working and have initiated a progress the Americans is calling "winning the hearts and minds" of the Greenlandic population and society as they want to be able to influence Greenland as the US have increased its economic and security interests on Greenland.

The diplomats at the Consulate are traveling throughout Greenland and hosting events for the locals and people seem to greet the American involvement with open arms (Mouritzen, I dag går Grønland til valg midt i en amerikansk charmeoffensiv: »Dansk diplomati er ved at få baghjul«, 2021).

The purpose of the Consulate is to be a guiding factor and preventing China or Russia from gaining essential influence that effects the development of Greenland. Due to the proximity to the United States, the US cannot afford that a rival power is gaining a foothold this close to the American continent, as Greenland geo strategically is essential in the defence of the mainland US. Therefore, the US have pressed Denmark, which maintains the defence and security authority of Greenland, to invest more money into surveillance and military equipment to obtain more information around the Danish territory around Greenland. As the Americans fear that the with the current defence it would not be sufficient to be able to warn the Thule Air base in case of an intrusion of Greenland or the area of Greenland by troops or nuclear armed submarines. This pressure has led to Denmark will invest into enhancing its surveillance capabilities by buying drones and establish radars in Greenland and at the Faroe Islands to be able to detect foreign submarines or ships (Mouritzen, USAs planer i Grønland stod klart, da Carla Sands sparkede ud efter Pompeo's nummer to og i stedet ramte Berlinskens medarbejder, 2021).

Analysis

To be able to create the geopolitical analysis of the cases, we first need to know the capabilities of both China and the United States. After knowing this of both states it possible to make a geopolitical analysis of the cases.

Capabilities of China

China has in the last many years increased its military development of its armed forces.

In the People's Liberation Army (PLAA), the army consist of approximately 975.000 active-duty personal in combat units and canfield 5800 tanks. In total based on a defence paper from 2019, the total manpower in People's Liberation Army 2 million people making it by far the largest military (Zhang Z. , 2021). In the latest white paper from 2019, they described the transition from a regional defence force to a trans-theatre operation (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 45). The PLAA has 13 group armies which consist of multiple combined-arms brigades, and China can field 78 combined-arms brigades, and this serves as the primary maneuverer force. Each of these comprises of approximately 5000 troops each and includes a mixture of heavy, medium, and light mechanised forces (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021). The PLAA has in the reason years fielded new combat systems and upgraded its capabilities while also restructuring its force to make in more efficient (Cheng, 2021). Much of the equipment of the PLAA is outdated and obsolete and approximately 40 percent of its main battle tank force is 20-40 years old and cannot effectively field modern weaponry without better equipment or training (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 45).

Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) consist of an overall battle force of approximately 355 ships and submarines, aircraft carriers, ocean going amphibius ships, mine warfare ships. But this does not include 85 patrol combatants which also include anti-ship cruise missiles. The ambition of PLAN is to increase its force to 420 ships by 2025 and 460 by 2030. The PLAN has had a focus on upgrading and modernizing its submarine force while also integrating modern technologies, China currently operates six nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), and 46 diesel-powered attack submarines (SSs). PLAN most likely operates between 65 to 70 submarines, and new ones will replace old one's one-to-one (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 49).

The PLAN has also gonethrough a robust shipbuilding program that focussed the surface combatants, here they are producing guided-missile cruiser (CGs), guided-missile destroyers (DDGs), and corvettes (FFLs). The intention of these is to increase the PLAN's air defence, anti-ship, anti-submarine capabilities. The navy has increased its focus on anti-surface warfare capabilities by the large shipbuilding project but also by equipping the surface ships with different kinds of Anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM). PLAN has also commissioned its first

domestic built aircraft carrier, thereby having its second and having its second domestic produced in production. The new one in production will be larger and contain a catapult system like the US variants and will commence the construction of a fourth this year. The two other aircraft carriers have a ski-jump launch method, and do not have the capacity to carry as many aircrafts as it is based on a former Soviet Kuznetsov design and can carry 24 to 36 j-15 fighters (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 50-51).

The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) currently is the third largest airforce in the world and the largest in the region with a total of 2800 aircraft, but 2250 combat aircraft. This number also includes fighters, strategic bombers, tactical bombers, multi-mission tactical, and attack aircraft. Some of the aircrafts consist of fourth- and fifth-generation fighters but otherwise it is mostly older variants or planes bought from Russia (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 55).

People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) do have a number of different ballistic missiles, and include land-based missiles of different kind that has the max range of 13.000 kilometers and has the capabilities of hitting the United States. PLARF has in its inventory different types of conventional mobile-launched short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. PLARF has the upper hand when it comes to ground-based ballistic missiles and has the ability to hit Guam with conventional strike from the IRBM class and called Dong Feng 26 (Zhang Z. , 2021). PLARF is developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) which will improve the nuclear strike capability. The amount of nuclear warheads are unknown and not official, but it is estimated it are between the low-200s to 350, but fewer than 100 are active. PLARF has increasingly accelerated its nuclear production, and some experts believes it is possible that China will have 1000 nuclear warheads at 2030 (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 92).

Capabilities of the United States

The United States military comprises of 1.35 million active personal and 800.000 in its reserve. The United States Army has a regular army of 485.900 personal, the army reserve constitutes of 189.800 personal and the army national Guard has 336.500 military personal, added to a total of 1.012.200 soldiers overall and canfield 6333 tanks. And these are divided into Brigade Combat Teams (BCT), and each consist of between 4400 and 4700 soldiers and in total there is 31 BCTs. These BCTs

consist of both the Main Battle Tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armoured fighting vehicle, and the attack helicopters (Spoehr, 2021).

The U.S. Navy consist of a total of 297 ships, which consist of aircraft carriers, Large Surface Combatant, Small Surface Combatant, Submarines of different class (SSBN, SSGN, and SSN), and amphibious Warships (Sadler, 2021). The U.S. Congress has set out a 355-ship goal, but due to the shortfalls in the shipyards, mainly due to underfunding defence budgets for the navy, and lack of investment in the shipyards has led to the shipbuilders to seek away from the shipyards. In 2020 the navy procured 12 ships and purchased 10 in 2021 and eight in 2022. From 2005 to 2020 the navy increased the size of its navy from 291 to 296, but China during the same time increased its navy from 216 to 360 warships (Sadler, 2021).

China does have the numerical advantage when it comes to ships, but many of the ships are smaller vessels such as coastal patrol ships. When it comes to the larger ships, the US does have the advantage in numbers technology and experience. The US 11 aircraft carriers are all nuclear-powered and can carry 60 or more fighters each (Zhang Z. , 2021).

The American military is expected to have 13.000 military aircraft, and 5504 which are operated by the US air force. This includes the F-35 lightning and the F-22 Raptor, some of the most advanced combat aircrafts (Zhang Z. , 2021), 1482 are active-duty fighters and 983 are combat-coded fighters. in terms of nuclear weapons, the United States is expected to have 5800 nuclear warheads, 3000 are available for deployment and 1400 warheads are on alert delivery systems. United States nuclear force is old and needs to be modernized (Geller, 2021). After presenting the capabilities of both China and the United States

Geopolitical analysis

First, to be able to do the analysis of why both China and the United States act as they do in the region, the system needs to be clarified. The system is multipolarity, meaning there are three great powers or more. In the region of the East Asia there is China, Russia, Japan, and the United States as great powers in the region. Through its bases in Hawaii and in Guam, and the bases in allied Japan and in the allied South Korea (Smith, Cheng, Klinger, & Lohman, 2021), the United States had been able to project its power through its presence of soldiers and the navy. The Rise of China both economically and militarily has created the rivalry, and as the US fear that China will become

a regional hegemon in more powerful than them and in time be able to threaten their coast beyond the pacific or the bases in Guam, Hawaii, and Japan. Due to that fact then they are doing what they can to contain them.

They do so by having a clear military presence through its carrier strike groups and supporting countries close to China which the United States either are allied to or have good relations with, such as Taiwan and Japan. The idea of creating a coalition of states will help keep China in check as they cannot do it by themselves, as the United States are having their navies and military forces around in other regions to keep other rivals in check and not allowing their rivals becoming hegemon in other regions, that could lead to threaten them from that region. By making arms deals with states such as Taiwan, Japan. The advantage of this is that many of the systems are compatible with each other, thereby fighting together will be far easier, along with the fact that especially Japan and the United States are often doing exercises together and therefore is used to navigate among each other.

As mentioned, both countries have had its problematic relationships with China. Japan and China have been old rivals and it looks like its going in the same direction with all the tensions. As Japan has never apologised for its crimes during the Second World War. Japan and China have an ongoing dispute evolving the territory in the Senkaku islands in Japanese and Diaoyutai in Chinese, which Japan is governing but China desire. Incursions has happened many times, and Japan has protested many times, as both parties perceive it as theirs (Huang, 2022). This can be very dangerous as both sides see it as their territories, which can create miscalculation that can incite to skirmishers around the island that could lead to war, both between China and Japan, but also the United States as they are enforced by the alliance. Even though in treaties are perceived as loose in the realist perspective as it is the national interest that are guiding the decision making. But as the situation is now then the United States would follow Japan.

The United would in the first place, need to keep a large enough force, that would deter any kind of aggression in both Taiwan, the South China Sea and East China Sea. China has also warned Taiwan not to make any big decisions that would lead to “independence” or a move in a direction of it. Both the United States has conducted naval exercises in the waters around Taiwan to show their presence and deter the other party from doing anything they would regret. As at the movement the two great powers a just testing each other, which sometimes crates close encounters by naval vessels sailing close to each other.

China wants to integrate Taiwan for many reasons. First, they believe it is their territory they lost to Japan in the wars during the century of humiliation, where imperialist colonisers came and conquered territory from China as it was weak (Goldstein, 2015, p. 32), second having that is grant better defensive possibilities as the island and the strait can act as a defensive buffer if fortifying the island. Third it allows the Chinese navy and marines to push forward to create a further defensive line at the second island chain (Lippert & Perthes, 2020). But as the United States has an unofficial defensive treaty that commits them to help in the defence of Taiwan, would an attack lead to a confrontation between the great powers. If the United States was to abandon this treaty in case of attack of Taiwan when they would most likely lose its allies in both Japan and the Philippines due to untrustworthiness. But Japan has also hinted that they might join if a contingency around Taiwan was to happen due to a security law from 2015 (Zhen, 2021).

The threatening of possible conflict if the United States was to help Taiwan obtaining independence, is another trick to deter the opponent from being too confident and ambitious. Currently China does not have the capabilities to invade Taiwan, but in five to six years it will be possible, (Reuters, 2022), and therefore continue with its modernization program and still do all to deter or thwart the United States engaging in any kind of operations. In terms of the defence of Taiwan the United States president has been very ambiguous and has with some opinions, while the military has said another thing. Thereby also creating more uncertainty. The flying through the ADIZ of Taiwan, can be seen as a way of both testing the defence of Taiwan but also the United States stand, but at the same time it can also create misunderstandings as the intentions are unknown. Xi Jinping having also said that Taiwan needs to be integrated into China and does not omit violence (Winther, 2021).

Likewise in the South China Sea, the occupying and fortifying is both to create a buffer zone, to protect China and giving a better opportunity to guard the imports most of its resources which are sailed through the strait of Malacca and into the South China Sea (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2021, p. 137). The fortifications will provide extra defence in an eventual conflict in which ballistic missiles and ASCM, the airfields and docking space for ships and submarines can be essential, as it creates an extra defensive dimension and thereby creating an anti-access and area denial. The disputed claims in the area have also created tensions between China and other claimants, and the militarization has also worried multiple, as they do not know of the intentions behind it, which has increased arms build-up of the neighbouring states such as Vietnam. The United States are on the other hand following the claim China has made in international waters

or in other states territorial waters, as it is in their interest that their navies can roam freely across the oceans and waters. Therefore, have the US naval ships along with carrier strike groups conducts freedom of navigation patrols with several nations in which they sail through the contested area in protest, to symbolize the invalidity of the claims. When this happens then China will follow them as in an anarchic world you can never trust other states intentions especially not the rival state.

It is not only in Asia the great powers have been competing for the region, but the United States does also have arctic possessions in Alaska and a presence in Greenland with a base containing a radar. China have also tried to buy an old dockyard and trying to invest in a minefield with the potential of producing REE used for military equipment and clean energies. The US was quick to do all in their power to make sure China did not enter Greenland. The perspectives of possible Chinese naval units' surface ships or submarines capable of roaming around close to the United States was a frightening for the Americans. For China it would be a strategic opportunity to be able to divert the attention away from their own coast.

In the next section the economic part of the rivalry will be explained through the Division of labour development theory.

[Economic analysis](#)

This section analyses the economic perspective of the rivalry. With China opening its economy for foreign capital and the change to the parallel development, it opened many doors for China, as different countries were investing into the country based on cheap labour wages. This can attract firstly plenty of manufacturing jobs, where they will gain a lot of technology and knowledge in the production of the given type of goods. As China are attracting more and more diverse industries, they are also capable of exporting it onwards as China is obtaining a higher level of industrialization at cheap labour cost. The increased Foreign direct investment is only furthering changing the supply chain and thereby making their production more diverse as they are adding capital and technology thereby it is possible to create investments and technology and different companies that are moving their earlier stage production to China, as the salaries are increasing, the same production is transferred to another region, where the wages are low (Xing, 2007). This is also how it can attract so many high-tech companies that has been a huge factor to Chinas growth. As China currently is needing minerals and other unprocessed to continue its development of the less developed regions, it can move middle stage manufacturing to others and that way obtain the resources. Most of the western countries have exported many of their late-stage products for cheaper products. Which has

increasingly helped developing China and gaining comparative advantages while doing so. In both through the vertical labour division and the horizontal labour division its possible both of developing themselves and improving the level of industrialization in the less developed regions and attracting high-tech stage companies. This are some of the main reasons for the rise of China as it has given change huge possibilities, as they are capable of trading with all countries in the world due to their different industrialization levels. This is what the United States fear, since China has possibilities of improving its economy then the US, are forced to try to cut of China for the newest microchips as part of the trade war, they see it as a chance to slow the growth of China, as they attempt to decouple the economy, due to the still ongoing trade war and the political differences.

Discussion/Conclusion

In the beginning of the project the following research question was asked: *How does the current US-China rivalry evolve towards further confrontation between the two powers?*

The relations between the United States and China have never been colder as there exist disputes all around China both in the South China Sea, with the US and its allies conducting Freedom of navigation operations, which can tense situations as the militaries are at such a close point.

When concerning trade there is likely not going to be any deals soon as the two are so far away from each other and as the relations is affected by geopolitical problematic such as Taiwan.

When it comes to Taiwan it is certainly the most dangerous situation as the United States and China do have a large fleet concentration around, and the US fleet at the bases in Japan. United States follows one-China policy but has also obligated to help Taiwan in any situation. The US is trying to deter China from invading Taiwan, by make their presence be known. China will likely continue testing Taiwan and its defence. But as the relations are getting worse and the relation between the two great powers become more and more confrontational.

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