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# The Rise of China and its Rivalry with USA; Is confrontation imminent?

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Master in International Relations, Strategy and Security, School of Social  
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**JANUARY 2024**



**MSc in International Relations, Strategy and  
Security**

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**PETROS BAKLORIS**

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**This thesis was submitted for distance acquisition of a  
postgraduate degree in International Relations, Strategy and  
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**Petros Bakloris**

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The Denotation

Petros Bakloris

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## **Abstract**

Since the collapse of the USSR, the USA and the international order have remained unopposed. Nevertheless, contemporary China has become a regional military power, a global economic power, and a significant voice in the international system as a result of its economic expansion.

In order to better understand this phenomenon and comprehend the intricate notions of power that are linked with China's rise, it is crucial to incorporate empirical evidence and apply theoretical frameworks to analyze the dynamic relationship between an emerging China and the United States of America. These two nations, both significant global powers, are experiencing a growing rivalry, making this case particularly noteworthy.

The balance and distribution of power, the amount of power each state wields, and the factors that affect a state's power—most notably hard indicators of power like geography, population, resources, military power, economy, and technology—all have a significant impact on the analysis of power. These elements are closely associated with the political capabilities of states and have the potential to significantly shape the nature of power at both national and international levels.

This dissertation aims to shed light on how a "rising" China will affect the geopolitical sway of the existing balance of power. To achieve this, the concept of power will be thoroughly analysed, and then an effort will be made to examine how China's rise has affected the geopolitical power of actors like the USA and to determine if there is a possibility for an imminent confrontation between the USA and China as the outcome of this rise.

Power analysis indicates that constructing a believable "victory theory" for either of the two contestants (USA-China) is a challenging task. Therefore, it is anticipated that despite ongoing geopolitical, geo-economic, technological, and ideological competition between China and the USA, they will be compelled to collaborate in addressing crucial matters that align their interests.

**Keywords:** Realism, Power, Hard power, Power factors, International system, Balance of power, Distribution of power, State's power, China's Rise, China - USA Rivalry, effects of Power, contemporary balance of power, imminent confrontation.



## Abstract in Greek

Από την κατάρρευση της ΕΣΣΔ, οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες της Αμερικής διατήρησαν την κυρίαρχη θέση τους στο παγκόσμιο στερέωμα χωρίς να υπάρξει ιδιαίτερη αμφισβήτηση από κάποιον δρώντα. Ωστόσο, η σύγχρονη Κίνα έχει γίνει μια περιφερειακή στρατιωτική δύναμη, μια παγκόσμια οικονομική δύναμη και μια σημαντική φωνή στο διεθνές σύστημα ως αποτέλεσμα της οικονομικής της επέκτασης που θα μπορούσε να αμφισβητήσει τον Ηγεμονικό ρολό τον ΗΠΑ.

Για να κατανοήσουμε καλύτερα αυτό το φαινόμενο της αναδύομενης Κίνας και να κατανοήσουμε την περίπλοκη έννοια της ισχύος, είναι ζωτικής σημασίας να ενσωματώσουμε εμπειρικές αποδείξεις και να εφαρμόσουμε θεωρητικά πλαίσια για να αναλύσουμε τη δυναμική σχέση μεταξύ μιας αναδύομενης Κίνας και των Ηνωμένων Πολιτειών της Αμερικής. Αυτά τα δύο έθνη, και οι δύο σημαντικές παγκόσμιες δυνάμεις, βιώνουν μια αυξανόμενη αντιπαλότητα, καθιστώντας αυτή την περίπτωση ιδιαίτερα αξιοσημείωτη.

Η ανάλυση της ισχύος επηρεάζεται σημαντικά από διάφορους παράγοντες, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της ισορροπίας και της κατανομής της, της έκτασης της ισχύος που ασκείται από κάθε κράτος και των παραγόντων που επηρεάζουν τη δύναμη ενός κράτους, όπως η γεωγραφία, πληθυσμός, η ενέργεια, οι στρατιωτικές δυνατότητες, η οικονομία και η τεχνολογία. Αυτά τα στοιχεία συνδέονται στενά με τις πολιτικές ικανότητες των κρατών και έχουν τη δυνατότητα να διαμορφώσουν σημαντικά τη φύση της εξουσίας τόσο σε εθνικό όσο και σε διεθνές επίπεδο.

Αυτή η διατριβή έχει ως στόχο να ρίξει φως στο πώς μια "αναδύομενη" Κίνα θα επηρεάσει την υπάρχουσα ισορροπία ισχύος. Για να επιτευχθεί αυτό, η έννοια της ισχύος θα αναλυθεί διεξοδικά και στη συνέχεια θα καταβληθεί προσπάθεια να εξεταστεί πώς η άνοδος της Κίνας έχει επηρεάσει τη γεωπολιτική δύναμη παραγόντων όπως οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες, και να απαντηθεί το εάν υπάρχει πιθανότητα για μια επικείμενη αντιπαράθεση μεταξύ των Ηνωμένων Πολιτειών και την Κίνα ως αποτέλεσμα αυτής της ανόδου.

Η ανάλυση ισχύος δείχνει ότι η κατασκευή μιας αξιόπιστης "θεωρίας νίκης" για τους δύο δρώντες (ΗΠΑ-Κίνα) είναι κάτι δύσκολο. Ως εκ τούτου, αναμένεται ότι παρά τον συνεχή γεωπολιτικό, γεωοικονομικό, τεχνολογικό και ιδεολογικό ανταγωνισμό μεταξύ Κίνας και

ΗΠΑ, θα αναγκαστούν να συνεργαστούν για την αντιμετώπιση κρίσιμων ζητημάτων που ευθυγραμμίζουν τα συμφέροντά τους.

**Λέξεις-κλειδιά:** Ρεαλισμός, Ισχύς, Σκληρή Ισχύς, Παράγοντες Ισχύος, Κατανομή Ισχύος, Ισχύς κράτους, Άνοδος της Κίνας, Ανταγωνισμός Κίνα - ΗΠΑ, επίδραση στην ισορροπία ισχύος, σύγχρονη ισορροπία δυνάμεων, εποικημένη σύγκρουση.

# **Chapter 1 -Introduction**

## **1.1 Background and Context**

Since the collapse of the USSR, the USA and the international order have remained unopposed. Nevertheless, contemporary China has become a regional military power, a global economic power, and a significant voice in the international system as a result of its economic expansion (Danner, 2018, pp. 28-96). China has experienced rapid economic growth and is currently the second-largest economy in the world (IMF, 2023). For many years, China's economy grew at a rate of over 6%, and it has since developed into the largest trading nation in the world (Platias, 2023, pp 21-39; Allison, 2017).

Additionally, since the beginning of the 1970s, China has assumed the role of being one of the five enduring members of the United Nations Security Council, displacing Taiwan from its previous position. Presently, China holds membership in several prominent international organisations, including the G8, G20 (comprising the wealthiest eight and twenty nations globally), ASEAN, and BRICS. The impact of this phenomenon in the South Asian region is significant (Allison, 2017).

The ascent of China has exerted a substantial influence on the global distribution of power, as it has strategically utilised its enhanced capabilities to challenge and erode liberal norms and principles. To better understand the phenomenon, it is crucial to incorporate empirical evidence and apply theoretical frameworks to analyse the dynamic relationship between an emerging China and the United States of America. These two nations, both significant global powers, are experiencing a growing rivalry, making this case particularly noteworthy.

An examination of the concept of power within the international system can provide insights in this case. The distribution and balance of power, as well as the degree to which each state can exert and influence power, have a significant impact on the analysis of power. Various factors, such as geography, population, resources, military capabilities, economic strength and technology, play a crucial role in shaping the power dynamics of states. These elements are closely associated with political capabilities and have the potential to significantly influence the nature of power at both national and international levels.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

A rivalry with the United States, the preeminent global power, is an unavoidable consequence of China's strengthening, since any nation's rise to power has some impact on the global balance of power. So, what does China's rise actually signify? Is China's rise going to affect the current status quo, and if yes, how soon? Will China try to change the current power structure to suit its own interests, or will it try to overturn it? How is this going to affect actors like the USA and its hegemonic role?

China has modernised its armed forces, and its navy is not limited to coastal seas but can operate globally. It is erecting a number of military facilities in the South China Sea on made-up islands perched atop reefs. Besides that, it has quickly expanded its diplomatic reach and involvement in international institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and has also invested in infrastructure all around the world (Yu, 2020, pp. 3-18; Allison, 2017).

Despite all that, it is still unclear what effects China's growth will have on the global balance of power. Policymakers and academics are arguing vigorously about this issue because it has practical implications for both international and national security. For those studying international relations theory, it also offers a fresh case study. This is a crucial subject for world leaders and politicians to think about as they formulate their countries' reactions to China's rising influence (Platias, 2023, pp 21-39; Fakiolas, 2013, pp. 79–119).

What policies these countries adopt will be significantly changed depending on whether these politicians see China as a harmful actor, a possible partner, or something in between. This issue has an impact on all facets of policy, including economics, defence, and diplomacy.

## **1.3 Research Question and Methods**

This dissertation will focus on the rivalry between the two superpowers, the USA and China. The aim is to investigate how a rising China will affect the geopolitical sway of the existing balance of power and whether the outcome will be an imminent confrontation between China and the USA.

The theoretical framework employed will be Political Realism (Gilpin, 1995; Morgenthau, 1948). This analysis will focus on Chinese-American interactions, exploring them through the lenses of international relations theory and strategic analysis. Specifically, it will evaluate these ties in relation to fundamental notions of political realism, such as power and the security dilemma.

The theory of realism was selected due to its perceived credibility in analysing state behaviour within the international system. The theory's interpretive efficacy and enduring credibility were the primary factors contributing to its selection over alternative theories within the field of international relations (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Gilpin, 1995; Morgenthau, 1948).

The founding figure of Political Realism is commonly considered to be Thucydides, who introduced this theory in his work titled "History of the Peloponnesian War." Other notable contributors to Political Realism include Nicholas Machiavelli, who presented his ideas in "The Prince," Edward H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, Raymond Aron, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin, Martin Wight, and Hedley Bull.

In order to answer the research question, this dissertation will employ a qualitative research approach, with a primary emphasis on conducting a comprehensive literature review on power drawing upon valid and comprehensive sources. The focus will be on the case study of USA-China relations.

In more detail, the concept of power will be thoroughly analysed. In the second chapter, a literature review is going to take place. The focus will be to analyse and interpret the idea of power based on the theoretical framework of political realism in order to gain a deeper understanding of reality. The components of hard power as well as the degree to which each state can exert and influence power have a significant impact on the analysis of power.

Soft power is a popular concept in international relations, promising a more civilized approach. However, it cannot deliver on its own and must be critically examined. Hard power, which includes the power of arms and money, is essential for a state's survival, development, and prosperity. Power reputation management is crucial for maintaining stability and deterrence. Soft power is more likely to mislead than enlighten, as it is not a reliable policy tool to enforce will, seal alliances, or prevent rivalries. In the anarchic international arena,

self-interest determines strategic history. When there is alignment of interests, soft power is unnecessary, and when there is conflict, it is useless (Katsoulas, 2022, pp. 50-57).

Thus, this dissertation main focus will be various hard power factors, such as geography, population, resources, military strength, economy, and technology, that play a crucial role in shaping the power dynamics of each state.

In the third chapter, an analysis of the relations between the USA and China will be presented. Through a historical lens and ideas about geopolitical interactions, such as the Thucydides Trap and the security dilemma, the focus will be to analyse the power status of the two actors (China and the USA) and to highlight how China's rise has affected the United States' leadership role.

Finally, the fourth chapter provides the conclusions of the research. The hypothesis is that, in the long run, China's ascent will affect in a negative way the geopolitical influence and power of the United States. Nevertheless, this negative effect that China's rise will pose on the USA's hegemonic role is not going to lead to an imminent confrontation between the USA and China.

#### 1.4 Relevance and Importance of the Research

To successfully craft a strategy to deal with a growing China, policymakers must have a thorough awareness of the topic, its implications, and the most efficient method to promote their national interests. If their presumptions are incorrect, failing to comprehend any one of these issues could have severe consequences in the future. This argument has ramifications for theories of international relations as well, and it will give academics a fresh case to analyse.

It is important to see how the USA, the current global hegemony, and the emerging China will interact. For the first time since the Cold War, the ascent of China will put the western liberal democratic system in jeopardy. Will China attempt to sabotage the present power system, alter it, or advance its interests through it?

## 1.5 Literature Review

### 1.5.1 Key Concepts, Theories and Studies

China is rising, as its economic growth, military modernization, and growing influence in international affairs frequently demonstrate. Similar to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, several countries have historically seen rapid expansion and been anticipated to rise to global power only to stagnate or decline. China, meanwhile, is expected to maintain its growth for a number of reasons, including its abundant natural resources and sizable demographic (Nye, 2015).

In regards to China's ascent and how it impacts the international system, there are three main schools of thought. China is rising and it is a bad actor; China is emerging and it may be a partner; China is not growing at all; or, at the very least, its growth is overblown and it is not an imminent threat (Danner, 2018, pp. 28-96).

The theory of realism posits that disputes among Great Powers in the international system can be attributed to disparities in their respective levels of development, which in turn lead to shifts in the allocation of power (Papasotiriou, 2009). These shifts ultimately result in changes to the global order. Numerous factors, including geography, population, economy, military strength, technology, and—most significantly—the dynamics of change, affect how states evolve (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Platias, 1995).

Thucydides, in his work, examines the disparate progress of states as the primary catalyst for shifts in state conduct, specifically pertaining to hegemonic behaviour. The exacerbation of unequal development contributes to the escalation of security issues and serves as the primary catalyst for the occurrence of armed conflicts (Platias 2023, pp. 35-73).

The quantifiable indices of power that fulfill the capabilities of nation-states pertain to military, economic, and technological power. These factors determine the hard power that a particular state possesses within the international system. The comparison in the above areas between the US and China is enlightening in order to provide valuable insights into the respective positions of these two global powers in the contemporary international system. Additionally, it allows for an examination of whether China's ascent may potentially engender a conflictual dynamic between these two players.

Power indicators vary in their development across different states and serve as a valuable tool for comparing the relative strengths of these states. The disparate advancement of these components will precipitate a shift in power distribution, subsequently leading to a change in the state's place within the international system's hierarchy, either ascending or descending (Nye, 2011).

There are several historical instances that substantiate this standpoint, and empirical evidence validates the underlying hypothesis. Thucydides, the progenitor of realist theory and a prominent figure in the field of international relations, explicitly asserts in his work on the Peloponnesian War that the primary catalyst for the conflict was the apprehension felt by Sparta, the preeminent power among the ancient Greek city-states, regarding the burgeoning influence of Athens (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Allison, 2017). The Thucydides Trap centers on the fundamental concept of the uneven growth of nations, particularly in relation to the dominant powers within the global system, as we will delve into in greater detail. This phenomenon, known as hegemonic rivalry, is a key aspect of the Thucydides Trap (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Allison, 2017; Nye, 2011; Gilpin, 1981).

This dissertation supports the notion that China's rise has been overestimated. Power analysis indicates that constructing a believable "victory theory" for either of the two contestants (USA-China) is a challenging task. Therefore, it is anticipated that despite ongoing geopolitical, geo-economic, technological, and ideological competition between China and the USA, they will be compelled to collaborate in addressing crucial matters that align their interests (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).

### 1.5.2 Key Debates and Controversies

In regards to China's ascent and how it impacts the international system, there are three main schools of thought. China is rising and it is a bad actor; China is emerging and it may be a partner; China is not growing at all; or, at the very least, its growth is overblown and it is not an imminent threat (Danner, 2018).

China at the military level has become more aggressive, especially in the South China Sea, as it has started building bases on artificial islands in disputed areas and employing dubious strategies, including a naval militia, to deter opposition to its territorial claims (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).



Academics and decision-makers frequently cite Deng Xiaoping's 24-character plan, which succeeded Mao Zedong as the de facto leader of China. According to this plan, China must conceal capacities and abate time in order to grow while attempting to forcefully advance its goals. They also emphasise the notion that China is concealing its capacities and waiting its turn as an indication that China will attack when it gets comfortable doing so (Doshi, 2019).

Nevertheless, other academics and decision-makers view China's rise favorably for the global order since they see it as a possible ally (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Chen et al., 2019). It is predicted that China will move towards democracy as it becomes more prosperous and advanced. China, in the international arena, acted with responsibility and avoided utilising its significant rise to meddle in foreign business (Chen et al., 2019). China is perceived as wanting to uphold peace and stability rather than overthrow the global balance of power due to its strong belief in the territorial sovereignty of nations, which it vehemently supports in international forums (CSIS, 2020).

Finally, some observers think China's ascent may not be occurring, or at the very least, may be overblown. They cite a number of prior events that appeared to be rising only to fall, plateau, or lose power, never rising to pose a threat to the existing power system. Experts point out that China also lacks the partnership framework that the western nations have created as well as a military force that can compete with them in a major fight (Nye, 2015).

## 1.6 Implications and contributions to Knowledge

### 1.6.1 Practical Implications

The fundamental conclusion from this study is that the USA, China's neighbours in the region, and the general balance of power will only be marginally negatively impacted by China's ascent. China does not yet have the power to fully enforce its will; therefore, its ascent will not have a significant effect on the contemporary system, for better or worse. It is anticipated that despite ongoing geopolitical, geo-economic, technological, and ideological competition between China and the US, they will be compelled to collaborate in addressing crucial matters that align their interests. China and the contemporary international community can cooperate positively. Even though it will be challenging, both the US and China even if they strive to outdo each other on the world stage they will have to retain open channels. This could end up working in their favour. The US will keep in regular contact with its Chinese

counterparts to forestall any misunderstandings and, by extension, military clashes. By resolving their economic differences diplomatically, the US and China can also achieve progress.

#### 1.6.2 Theoretical Implications

The fear mongering proclaiming China's rise as an introspective and urgent threat to the United States and the global balance of power seems overblown and it prevents serious discussion regarding how the United States and its western allies should look to deal with China. The same is true for those who think China is safe and just want to preserve world stability and good relations with the remainder of the world. The latter is naive about the real nature of states, while the former is alarmist. It appears that China seeks to balance its intentions and objectives with its available resources. Evidence shows that the world will soon transition from being unipolar to being multipolar, with the USA, China, and the EU acting as the major players. Of course In the years to come, Russia and India will also remain significant regional players. (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194)

## **Chapter 2–Literature Review**

In this chapter, a literature review is going to take place. The focus will be to analyse and interpret the idea of power based on the theoretical framework of political realism in

order to gain a deeper understanding of reality. The analysis of power is significantly influenced by the elements of hard power, as well as the extent to which each state can exert and impact power. Thus, various hard power factors, such as geography, population, resources, military strength, economy, and technology that play a crucial role in shaping the power dynamics of each state will be analyzed. These elements, which are closely tied to political capabilities, have the potential to significantly shape the nature of power at both national and international levels.

## 2.1 The Realist Paradigm

The realist theory of international relations places emphasis on key features such as the presence of anarchy within the international system, the maintenance of a balance of power among nations to guarantee their survival, and the utilisation of warfare as a tool to enhance or safeguard a state's position within the competitive international arena (Platias, 2023, pp. 21-34). Therefore, the realist theory says that the international system is in a state of anarchy (Platias, 2023, pp. 37-59), a state of intense competition between all the players, since there is no central authority that can bring order to any place or time (Papasotiriou, 2009).

The international system of nations is characterised by its dynamic nature, undergoing continuous evolution over time rather than being in a static condition. The concept under consideration possesses inherent structural and functional characteristics. It consists of a number of states specifically, and these states' reciprocal effects serve as its main function (Kouskouvelis, 2004).

The state, in contemporary society, represents the most advanced level of human organisation. It serves as the framework within which various aspects of human activity unfold, including political, social, economic, ideological, and scientific endeavours (Kouskouvelis, 2004). According to the realist perspective, the absence of a superior form of political organisation among states is the fundamental source of anarchy within the international system (Kouskouvelis, 2004).

In contemporary times, it is evident that the European model of states, which progressively evolved following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, has been upheld, establishing its preeminent position and necessitating unwavering reverence (Papasotiriou,

2009). According to Platias (1995), in an anarchical society, sovereign nations' top priority should be to prioritise their survival by securing their existence and independence through reasonable means (Baylis, Smith, and Owens, 2011). In the context of the unregulated and fiercely competitive global system, there is no doubt that the primary goal that nations pursue serves as an essential foundation for their subsequent economic and political advancement and success (Gilpin 1995).

Nevertheless, as individuals grow more powerful, they tend to evoke feelings of uneasiness in others due to the perception that they pose a risk, whether real or potential (Papasotiriou, 2009). The aforementioned scenario gives rise to the security dilemma, wherein nations are compelled to engage in strategic calculations regarding the allocation of power within the global framework in order to safeguard their own survival and autonomy. In this situation, states operate in accordance with the overriding principle of ensuring their own survival rather than following ethical principles (Papasotiriou, 2009).

Additionally, the theory of political realism (Platias, 1995) explains that states' sensitivity to costs contributes to their rational behaviour. In an international system characterised by anarchy, the attainment of peace is not inherently clear and does not arise from the imposition of any international organisation, be it political or economic in nature. Realists argue, based on numerous historical instances, that peace is attained and maintained within the inherently anarchic international order through the application of the balance of power mechanism (Platias, 2023). The attainment of equilibrium among opposing powers, as previously mentioned, occurs when states willingly endeavour to counterbalance their adversaries (Platias, 1995).

Prominent proponents of the power balance theory include Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer, albeit with some variation. In the ensuing discussion, we shall elucidate a selection of their major differences. According to Morgenthau, a significant proportion of the conflicts that have occurred within the contemporary interstate system can be attributed to the concept of balance of power. (Morgenthau, 1973).

By contrast, Waltz's perspective diverges as he posits that an unregulated global system serves as a fundamental requirement for the necessity of equilibrium, as it compels states to act in a logical manner. Initially, nations prioritise safeguarding their existence and independence before pursuing expansion (Waltz, 1979). Similarly, Mearsheimer posits that

states exhibit a perpetual inclination to optimise their gains. However, according to Mearsheimer (2001), Great Powers seek to establish hegemony within their immediate periphery, followed by extending their hegemonic influence to other regions.

Political realism is widely regarded as the most complete and valid methodological approach for comprehending the developing competition between the United States and China (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194). The theory of realism was selected due to its perceived credibility in analysing state behaviour within the international system. The theory's interpretive efficacy and enduring credibility were the primary factors contributing to its selection over alternative theories within the field of international relations (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Gilpin, 1995; Morgenthau, 1948). Moreover, as the sole theory that has effectively elucidated the transformations within the international system over a span of twenty five centuries, it can be employed with a reasonable degree of confidence to prognosticate future developments. For that reason, in the following sections, through the prism of realism, the transformation of China in terms of power and through the security dilemma theory will be analysed in order to have useful insights of what this ascend signifies.

According to Platias (1995), wealth and power serve as the means to provide security. The concept of power holds a fundamental position within the framework of realism theory. Hans J. Morgenthau posits that politics can be seen as a contest for power, as stated in his work published in 1978. Similarly, Edward H. Carr argues that politics inherently revolves around power in some way (Carr, 2000). The evident relationship between politics and power, encompassing various interpretations, is readily apparent. According to Kouskouvelis (2004), power can be defined as the capacity and intention to assert one's desires over others, whether by coercive means such as violence or through the use of influence. In the following section, the concept of power will be analysed in more detail.

## 2.2 Definition of Power

The study of the concept of power reveals the inherent challenge of establishing a precise and universally accepted definition. Power is a fundamental element necessary for

sustenance and advancement in a highly competitive setting. Considering multiple perspectives, it can be concisely characterised as the capacity of an individual or entity to exert influence on another party, whether through direct coercion or indirect means, in order to achieve their desired outcomes. Thucydides posits that power dynamics exhibit temporal variability and lack stability, as they are subject to the effect of time and reciprocally shape all power balances and dynamics (Keegan, 1997, p. 27).

According to Parisi (2011, p. 15), power is the fundamental factor that defines the dynamics between actors in the international arena and acts as the central point of reference for analysing the conduct of states within the global system. The subject under discussion is one that elicits significant controversy and is characterised by a lack of comprehensive understanding among the majority of those involved in the field (Nye, 2004, p. 1). The acquisition of power is a paramount preoccupation for large countries, which are the principal actors within the international system, since they want to achieve dominance above all other objectives. Governments that possess the ability to extend their powers across vast distances and during several historical eras are considered the most influential (Parisi, 2011, p. 37).

Power can be linked to the ability to exert influence over the actions of others in order to attain specific objectives. Nevertheless, a crucial need for assessing power by influencing the actions of others is to initially comprehend their individual preferences. Hence, it may be deduced that power is contingent upon the specific circumstances and the nature of the interactions among individuals or entities (Nye, 2004, p. 2).

When considering a state's capacity to influence the conduct of other states, the primary determinant is the possession of capabilities that confer an advantage in altering the behaviour of others. According to Viotti and Kauppi (2013), the term "capabilities" refers to both tangible and intangible assets that can be utilised to establish and exert influence. Irrespective of the duration leaders allocate to the process of identifying their objectives and devising tactics, the attainment of these goals necessitates the use of power. Moreover, power functions as a mechanism to attain specific objectives within the context of international relations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013).

In addition to that, according to the assertions made by John Mearsheimer, power holds paramount significance in the realm of international relations, comparable to the role of money in the economy. Consequently, governments engage in heated competition to secure

power (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 12). Mearsheimer also classifies power into two primary forms: military power and latent power, which refers to its potentiality. The author's analysis primarily emphasises the significance of the military dimension of power, asserting that the attainment of effective authority is contingent upon possessing strong military capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 27). In contrast, latent power encompasses socio-economic factors, such as income and population size, that exert a substantial influence on the development of military strength (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 27). The significance of the latent dimension of power is indisputable, as the attainment of military force is contingent upon economic resources, rendering it unattainable in their absence (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 76). Therefore, economic resources play a crucial role in determining a country's military capabilities.

Finally, Morgenthau argues that when assessing power, it is crucial to avoid three key errors. Firstly, one should not overlook the relative nature of power and mistakenly portray a state's power as absolute. Secondly, one should not assume the permanence of a specific factor that has historically played a decisive role, but rather acknowledge the significant changes that can occur in the factors influencing power. Lastly, one should not adhere exclusively to a single factor while disregarding all other relevant factors (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 160).

The components of hard power, as well as the degree to which each state can exert and influence power, have a significant impact on the analysis of power. "Hard power" refers to the use of coercive tactics, including military force and economic sanctions, to influence the behaviour or decisions of other states or actors. This contrasts with "soft power," which relies on persuasion, attraction, and cooperation to achieve objectives (Waltz, 1979). Thus, various hard power factors, such as geography, population, resources, military strength, economy, and technology, that play a crucial role in shaping the power dynamics of each state will be further analysed.

### 2.3 National Sources of Power.

As it was already highlighted, sources of power encompass the various tools and assets that individuals, organisations, or states might employ to exert influence, exercise control, or attain their desired aims. There exist multiple forms of power, which are commonly classified

as hard power and soft power, and these sources are observable throughout diverse domains of human society (Parisis, 2011). This dissertation will focus on hard power indicators.

A wide range of factors can affect the sources and acquisition of power. These factors may relate to a state's trade relationships, economy, natural resources, proximity to specific states, technology, military capabilities, and many more. So, it's important to group the basic things that make up power, including those that come from advances in technology that change things that were already there (Flouros *et al.*, 2018, pp. 143-160).

Power is influenced by various elements, which can be broadly classified into two categories: stable factors and changing factors. Stable variables encompass a state's geographical location and configuration, its accessible natural resources, and the surrounding environment. The second group encompasses several factors, such as military might, economic strength, technological advancements, industrial capacity, and other relevant capabilities. Within this set of criteria, there are additional factors that may not be readily apparent but nonetheless exert influence. These include the quality of government, alliances, national character, and diplomatic quality. The following is taxonomy of the primary determinants and notable sub-divisions pertaining to the essence of power (Barnett and Duvall, 2005, pp. 39-75).

### 2.3.1 Hard Power and main Indicators of Power.

Joseph Nye's conceptualization of power involves a fundamental differentiation between two primary forms: soft and hard power. Soft power can be understood as a type of influence that effectively convinces others to align their desires and preferences with those of the entity possessing power without resorting to coercive measures. Nye argues that soft power relies on emotional intelligence, effective communication, and especially the ability to anticipate future events (Nye, 2015).

Usually, the term "hard power" is more familiar because it is believed that military and economic strength are not easily relinquished. For this reason the present paper is focusing on hard power indicators (Mingjiang, 2009). The use of coercive measures, such as the imposition of violent threats or the implementation of various consequences, including



economic repercussions, can change a person's preferences and encourage compliance. One can also employ economic leverage to drive individuals, either by offering incentives or by imposing restrictions on their preferences, influencing the agenda in a manner that portrays their wants as extremely impractical.

The hard form of power often carries a positive connotation when it is employed for the greater good or in the pursuit of peace. The general public shares this perception of legitimacy (Mingjiang, 2009). The present iteration also possesses its own set of resources and focus on elements of hard power, placing particular emphasis on geography, population and resources as a set of characteristics and military strength, economy and technology as the main indicators of hard power.

#### *2.3.1.1 Geography, Population, Resources*

This category pertains to geographical considerations, with a primary focus on the geographical position, which can present either advantageous or challenging circumstances. Additionally, it considers natural resources, the extent of occupied territory in terms of land area and population size, as well as other elements such as shape, climate, population, and human resources. Geography can be regarded as the foundational structure within which various other aspects evolve (Parisis, 2011).

The environment and the availability of natural resources have a significant impact on the determination of power. In relation to natural resources, this section examines the ownership, authority, and capacity to exploit primary resources such as water, food, climate, and arable land, which confer a substantial advantage in terms of attaining economic prosperity and political influence. Additionally, it addresses secondary resources such as oil and natural gas (Parisis, 2011, p. 133).

The availability of energy resources plays a crucial role in global advancements (Flouros *et al.*, 2018, p. 108). The APERC (Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre) asserts that the power of a state is contingent upon its energy security, which is influenced by various factors such as resource availability and accessibility, environmental suitability for resource utilization, and the willingness to bear associated costs (Flouros *et al.*, 2019, pp. 56-74).

Major water sources encompass significant rivers, among which the Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, and Jordan hold the utmost significance. Water systems have become a critical element of power, security, and stability, involving multiple nations (Parisis, 2011, pp. 114–115). The matter of food, which is contingent upon the accessibility of cultivable land, has a significant impact on a nation's capacity to rely on essential food resources or achieve self-sufficiency in this domain (Parisis, 2011, p. 117).

Furthermore, climate change is a substantial determinant that has had and will continue to exert influence on power dynamics. The effects of this field, such as the threat to the survival of many ecological systems, are felt in many areas and have different kinds of effects on people's lives. These effects include public health, managing natural resources, and the economies of different states (Pascual & Zambetakis, 2010, p. 23).

#### *2.3.1.2 Military Power*

A nation's military might serves as an example of its true power. Historical evidence demonstrates that successful outcomes in warfare have often facilitated the rise of new powers, while unsuccessful outcomes have frequently resulted in the entire forfeiture of power (Parisis, 2011, p. 146). The military domain remains a significant determinant of power in the global arena and has garnered considerable attention from scholars in various academic investigations (Baldwin, 2016, p. 175).

Throughout the course of history, the utilisation of weaponry, aircraft, and formidable armies has played a pivotal role in shaping power dynamics within the realm of international relations for several centuries. Democracies, monarchies, autocratic regimes, and theocracies have historically prioritised the development and enhancement of their military capacities as a fundamental component of their overall power and influence. Nations allocate substantial financial resources each year to bolster their military capacities by means of arms acquisition and the advancement of technology that might contribute to the reinforcement of their military capabilities (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013).

The introduction of nuclear weapons has brought about significant changes to the global landscape, particularly in relation to power dynamics, and states perceive that the possession of weapons, namely nuclear armaments, contributes to the augmentation of their worldwide

reputation and prestige (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013, p. 209). However, it's important to keep in mind that owning firearms, especially in large quantities, does not necessarily imply proficiency in using them, nor does it ensure that an adversary will be susceptible to these methods of attack (Baldwin, 2016, p. 176).

Furthermore, it is important to note that conflicts manifest themselves in several forms, such as, limited conventional, chemical, biological and nuclear, warfare. This highlights the fact that the efficacy of resources employed in one type of conflict cannot be readily applied to another form of confrontation. Not all nations have the financial capacity to procure equivalent quantities of these resources (Baldwin, 2016, p. 180).

The utilisation of military strength can function as a mechanism for the projection of power. The efficient projection of power necessitates the entity's capacity to proficiently utilise a wide range, if not all, of the accessible ways of power. The ability to carry out operations related to actual warfare, the ability to carry out these military operations outside of one's own territory, the promptness to intervene when deemed necessary, and the capacity to sustain operational needs over extended periods of time are examples of genuine military strength (Giegerich, Childs, and Hackett, 2018).

In summary, the assessment of military strength is unquestionably contingent upon the evaluation of current or prospective military capacities, in conjunction with collaboration with comparably proficient allies. Nevertheless, the military's capabilities are invariably contingent upon the robustness of the economy. The economic capabilities that are in place ultimately limit the military capabilities that policymakers choose (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013).

#### *2.3.1.3 Economic Power*

Wealth, along with military capabilities, has always been an indicator of superiority, power, and strength. According to Parisi (2011, p. 169), the ability to obtain resources, such as weapons, is closely linked to the level of economic success. One intriguing viewpoint is presented by Ralph Hawtrey, who posits that military conflicts are driven by a pursuit of economic power, as economic power is deemed the paramount factor in the attainment of authority (Hawtrey, 1952).

A country's economic strength is positively correlated with the level of diversification in its economy, enabling it to enhance its production and sales capabilities. An economy is more likely to experience domestic infrastructural development and technical improvements. Nations lacking a robust or varied economic structure may encounter challenges in their ability to effectively participate in global markets and may exhibit heightened susceptibility to both domestic and foreign economic disturbances (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013).

Thucydides assigned considerable importance to the notion of internal balance, among other factors and emphasised the significance of employing available resources in order to efficiently tackle potential dangers. According to Thucydides, the resources that are referenced pertain to the economic domain. It is imperative to engage in adequate preparation and implement requisite modifications within the national economy in order to effectively harness these resources during periods of national exigency (Smagas, 2014, p. 34).

The manifestation of economic power can be observed through the implementation of economic warfare, which involves inflicting significant economic damage on the economies of other nations. The execution of initiatives intended to aid developing nations is another way to demonstrate economic power. There exist multiple methodologies for assessing economic capacity. One method involves the observation of GNP (gross national product), which serves as a comprehensive measure of the aggregate market value of all commodities and services generated by the inhabitants and enterprises within a particular nation, irrespective of their geographical distribution. Another important metric is GDP (gross domestic product), which quantifies the aggregate market value of all products and services generated within a nation (Payne, 2013: 26).

Several instances in the realm of economics involve nations that emerged as exemplars of economic performance following the disintegration of communist regimes. Notable illustrations include Slovenia, the Baltic Republics, and Chile, among others. Presently, the BRIC nations, namely China, Russia, Brazil, and India, are demonstrating noteworthy advancements in their own economies (Platias. 2023, p. 171-193; Allison, 2017; Parisi, 2011, p. 173). The concept of power in the field of international relations is a significant and much studied topic. The management of global wealth by economically powerful players might be seen as a reflection of reality on our planet. The economic power of dominant nations can be influenced by non-state players who become stakeholders in wealth accumulation, including terrorist organizations, among other groups.

#### 2.3.1.4 *Technology*

Political and economic factors are just two of the many factors that affect technological advancement. This phenomenon holds significant importance in the establishment and acquisition of power (Baldwin, 2016). Historically, major countries have consistently demonstrated a preference for leading the way in the advancement of novel technologies. This strategic inclination stems from the recognition that a successful breakthrough in technology can provide a substantial edge over rival entities (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 232).

The significance of technology in upholding the effectiveness and preparedness of the armed forces to tackle emerging challenges cannot be overstated. The field of defence and military technology, which draws upon the principles of applied physical sciences, plays a significant role in enhancing military capabilities (Dimitriou, 2018, pp. 36–37).

Moreover, the advancements in current military technologies and communication systems have created a need for the development of heavy industry in order to safeguard national might. This observation highlights the role of emerging technology in facilitating the concentration of power among a select few (Baldwin, 2016; Deutsch, 1959, p. 674).

There is a growing apprehension regarding the utilisation of contemporary technologies within the military domain, particularly those pertaining to the application of force and the dismantling of obstacles, such as nuclear weapons and other forms of mass destruction. This concern primarily revolves around non-democratic regimes and, by extension, non-state entities characterised by organised structures, such as terrorist groups (Baldwin, 2016).

## **Chapter 3 -China Case Study**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The chapter's focus is on how a rising China may challenge the United States' leadership role. Through historical lenses and ideas about geopolitical interactions, such as the Thucydides Trap, the focus will be to analyse how China's rise has affected the United States' economic, military, and leadership roles and to forecast if this security dilemma is going to lead to an imminent confrontation between the USA and China. This choice of case study is particularly apt given the United States' current status as the world's leading superpower. The international system's dynamics are intricately connected to the interactions between these two giants, and their evolving relationship holds significant implications for global stability.

As the United States and China continue to wield immense global influence, their interactions are pivotal to understanding the evolving international balance of power. The lessons drawn from this case study can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of a rising power challenging an established one. It is not merely about the two nations themselves but about the broader implications for the world order. By analysing this scenario, scholars and policymakers can contribute to conflict prevention and informed decision-making on the international stage.

In the absence of a substantial amount of quantitative data, a case study approach is not only suitable but necessary to address the research question effectively. The historical cases of rising and declining powers offer rich narratives that illuminate the complexities of international relations. Moreover, applying established theories like the Thucydides Trap can provide a theoretical basis for understanding these dynamics and, in turn, guide policymakers in navigating the complexities of this crucial relationship.

In this chapter, an analysis of the relations between the USA and China will be presented. Through a historical lens and ideas about geopolitical interactions, such as the Thucydides Trap and the security dilemma, the focus will be on analysing the power status of the two actors (China and the USA) and to highlight how China's rise has affected the United States' leadership role.

### 3.2 The Thucydides Trap

The apprehensions regarding the dynamics between a dominant power and an emerging power are not novel. Thucydides made one of the initial endeavours to elucidate this issue in his work, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The author provides an account of the responses exhibited by the Greek city-state of Sparta in relation to the escalating influence of its adversary, Athens. Sparta, perceiving a growing threat from the ascendance of Athens, made the strategic decision to neutralise its adversary prior to its potential consolidation of excessive power, thus instigating the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides posited, in what has come to be widely recognised as the Thucydides Trap, that the occurrence of war may be unavoidable when a dominant power poses a threat to supplant another (Thucydides, 1972; Krikke, 2022; Allison, 2017).

In contemporary international politics, the concept known as the Thucydides Trap, originally introduced by Graham T. Allison, an American political scientist, pertains to a scenario in which the ascent of a dominant power instills apprehension in an existing power, hence engendering a series of mounting tensions that may ultimately culminate in armed conflict (Krikke, 2022; Allison, 2017). In the realm of China-USA relations, the Thucydides Trap posits that the ascendance of China as a prominent global power, along with the resultant apprehension it evokes inside the United States, may engender an inescapable trajectory towards confrontation between these two nations. According to Allison (2017), it is said that

throughout the course of the last five centuries, there have been a total of 16 instances in which a rising power has contested the authority of a dominant power. Out of these occurrences, 12 ultimately led to armed conflict.

However, there are competing opinions regarding the aforementioned notion. Scholars have noted that there are instances in which a rising power can peacefully replace a waning one (Shambaugh, 2016). Furthermore, a number of researchers have suggested that the aforementioned thesis might not be applicable to the rivalry between China and the United States because China's aspirations are primarily internal in nature. It is argued that China's economic vulnerabilities, ageing population, and emigration of Chinese citizens are factors that contribute to China's perceived weakness in the context of a potential conflict (Krikke, 2022).

An illustrative instance of this phenomenon transpired when the United States assumed the role of a global leader, surpassing the United Kingdom, in the absence of armed hostilities or confrontations (Allison, 2017). There are alternative viewpoints positing that China's potential to surpass the United States is unsubstantiated, hence challenging the prevailing notion. These authors frequently cite Japan and the "Four Asian Tigers" as examples, which were once thought to surpass the United States but eventually did not succeed in doing so (Nye, 2015). The future interactions between the United States and China will exert a substantial influence on the bilateral relations between these two countries.

The potential occurrence of the Thucydides Trap in China-USA relations remains uncertain; yet, it is evident that this theoretical construct offers a valuable framework for comprehending the dynamics inherent in this pivotal bilateral association. As both nations persist in navigating their respective positions within the international arena, it becomes imperative for them to exercise prudent management of their bilateral relations in order to prevent succumbing to the pitfalls of historical patterns (Shambaugh, 2016).

### 3.3 China's Rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The ascendance of China represents a highly consequential matter within the realm of world politics during the 21st century. Throughout history, China has consistently held a prominent position within the international system owing to its extensive landmass, plentiful resources, and substantial population (Swaine & Tellis, 2000). The groundwork for China's



ascent in the 21st century was established during the latter part of the 1970s, following the succession of Deng Xiaoping to the leadership position previously held by Mao Zedong.

The ascent of Deng Xiaoping to a position of authority marked a significant turning point in the trajectory of China's socio-economic progress. The period spanning from 1966 to 1976 witnessed the execution of Mao's Cultural Revolution, which concluded with his demise in 1976. This transformative phase plunged China into a state of economic ruin and internal unrest. The fundamental catalyst for the instability can be attributed to the internal power battles that transpired inside the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Papasotiriou, 2013, pp 271-298).

The Chinese Communist Party's accusations against party leaders and intellectuals, branding them as counter-revolutionary elements, marked the official start of the Cultural Revolution in 1968 (Papasotiriou, 2013, pp 271-298). The profound ramifications of the Cultural Revolution facilitated the resurgence of Deng Xiaoping's political ascendancy. President Deng implemented a cessation of closed-door economic policies, strategically utilised diplomatic reconciliation with the United States, and pursued economic engagement with neighbouring states possessing significant economic influence, resulting in China attracting considerable international direct investment and becoming a notable exporter (Clegg, 2008)

Early in the 1970s, the two countries began to establish diplomatic ties, and in 1972, President Nixon paid a formal visit to China and spoke with Mao there. Upon the conclusion of the visit, the signing of the Shanghai Communique took place. This document pertained to the enhancement of bilateral relations between the two nations, their shared resolve to prevent the occurrence of armed hostilities, and their mutual commitment to refrain from asserting hegemonic aspirations within the Asia-Pacific region (Kissinger, 1994, pp. 187-193).

Ongoing communication between the two nations persisted, involving President Carter and his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, representing the United States, and Deng Xiaoping, representing the Chinese Communist Party. The outcome of these deliberations led to the issuance of a collaborative statement acknowledging the existence of China and commencing the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the United States and China (Guo, 2006).

The initial favourable outcomes of the policies enacted by Deng Xiaoping became evident during the mid-1980s, while this decade witnessed China's consolidation of the various components essential for the formation of its comprehensive national strength, mostly through economic advancement. This particular era held great significance for China because of its emergence from a brief yet noteworthy period of international isolation in 1989 (Sulaiman, 2001, pp. 187–193).

Within a very short span of time, China has successfully emerged as a prominent force in both the military and economic realms within the global system. Deng's successor, Jiang Zemin, also pursued a dynamic economic reform programme, which offered a substantial boost to Chinese development, and this continued during the tenure of the next president, Hu Jintao (Goldstein, 2005).

The rapid process of economic development in China resulted in a consequential shift towards the acquisition of military and political influence. During subsequent years, there was a notable enhancement of the Chinese armed forces, accompanied by efforts in international trade and diplomacy. China sought to engage with its neighbouring countries in order to address longstanding historical disputes (Goldstein, 2005).

In contemporary times, President Xi Jinping has introduced the concept of the "Chinese Dream," a vision that aims to revitalise the Chinese nation and is projected to be accomplished by the middle of the 21st century. Xi Jinping himself first introduced the idea of the "Xi's Chinese Dream" in November 2012, which served as a manifestation of the new Chinese leader's desired course for China's future. The concept of the Chinese Dream encompasses the revitalization of the Chinese country, the economic well-being of the Chinese state, and the overall welfare of its populace (The Economist, 2013).

Xi Jinping has made the strategic decision to embrace a vision that is characterised by strong emotional appeal. This vision, for the first time, places significant emphasis on the necessity of implementing changes in order to enhance the level of public endorsement for the communist government. This regime is portrayed as the exclusive provider of both prosperity and advancement (Wang, 2013).

The robust involvement of China in military, economic, and diplomatic endeavours quickly gave rise to apprehensions among numerous nations, particularly the United States,

regarding China's expanding influence in the subregion of East Asia. Nonetheless, this apprehension had underlying origins and was predominantly associated with the modernization of the Chinese military (Sulaiman, 2001, pp. 187–193).

In 1997, Joseph Nye made an observation regarding the burgeoning Chinese military, emphasising its significance as a novel element in the East Asian region that warrants attention (Nye, 1997). According to Sulaiman (2001, pp. 187–193), it is likely that many states have inevitably come to the conclusion, as Henry Kissinger suggested, that China's actions are indicative of a larger geopolitical and ideological agenda.

China has made efforts to address these issues since the mid-1990s by advocating its own interpretation of its development strategy. China consistently asserts, in its numerous public declarations, that it is pursuing a trajectory characterised by peaceful ascendance rather than adopting an aggressive approach aimed at achieving global hegemony. China has responded to the perception that it poses a threat by claiming that this viewpoint is a product of Cold War ideologies and that there is prejudice against the Chinese government (Deng, 2008).

China's self-identification as a peaceful force is articulated in the 2011 White Paper entitled "China's Peaceful Development." All countries should support the statement's collective aspiration of fostering a peaceful and stable global environment through diplomatic means. The Chinese state is dedicated to fostering international peace and cooperation without harbouring any aggressive or hegemonic aspirations.

Additionally, it underscores the significance of international peace and stability for China since it enables the nation to concentrate exclusively on its economic advancement. In this particular context, China asserts that its economic progress is exclusively oriented towards the welfare of the nation and its populace, rather than pursuing regional dominance. Concurrently, China attempts to emphasise its status as a responsible global actor.

Moreover, the attainment of global hegemony is deemed unattainable due to the inherent challenges associated with force projection over vast oceanic distances. Consequently, major countries tend to concentrate their efforts on establishing and maintaining regional hegemony (Guo, 2006). If this hypothesis is confirmed, it would imply that China aims to diminish the United States' presence and influence in Southeast Asia while

simultaneously seeking to widen the power disparity between itself and nations such as Russia and Japan.

Without a doubt, the United States would perceive this development as a substantial problem and would undertake all measures it thinks are essential to address it. Considering the historical facts from the 20th century pertaining to United States foreign policy, it is improbable that Washington would exhibit tolerance towards the establishment of a novel regional hegemony (Allison, 2017; Nincic, 2003).

Therefore, based on this viewpoint, it is probable that a high level of security competition between Beijing and Washington will not be observed and there is a high probability within the context of self-regulation, adversaries will engage in balancing actions to counterbalance such power-seeking behaviour.

### 3.4 Power Factors

The allocation of power for study purposes should be designated to certain individual factors commonly referred to as power factors. At this juncture, it is pertinent to note that the material factors encompass various aspects such as geographical location, population, wealth, armed forces, and technological capabilities, which contribute to a state's hard power (Kouskouvelis, 2004).

The presence of the aforementioned variables in varying degrees and magnitudes is what distinguishes the states from one another. The correlation between power and wealth, as well as the interplay between politics and economics, is readily apparent, hence rendering every struggle inherently political and economic in nature. The competition among states encompasses both geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194). Therefore, in accordance with the principles of realism, states strive to acquire power in order to guarantee their own security. In the following paragraphs, the power factors mentioned above are detailed for both actors, the USA and China.

### 3.4.1 China

#### 3.4.1.1 *Geography, Population, Resources*

By land or by sea, China is encircled by other nations. It is heavily dependent on foreign resources, especially for energy supply. Its disadvantageous position could pose a significant problem if its rivals (e.g., the USA) decide to cut off its maritime outlets (e.g., the Straits of Malacca) (Grivas, 2021).

The corrupt development of their populations exacerbates the unequal growth of states. A state's population, in addition to its size and rate of development, is a source of power (Platias, 1995). The world population is rising, and the population expansion in Third World countries is mostly responsible for this quick increase. However, it is important to note that the demographic boom carries significant repercussions in both the social and military domains (Platias, 1995). In a more specific context, it has been observed that rapid population growth has the potential to give rise to political instability. This is due to the simultaneous increase in law enforcement demands, unemployment rates, and poverty levels, which can generate significant social discontent and trigger migratory movements towards the most affluent places globally (Platias, 1995).

From 1950 to 2023, China's population has increased from 543,979,233 individuals to 1,425,671,352. The population size has grown by 162.08% during a period of 73 years. The population of China as of July 1, 2023, is at 1,425,671,352 individuals, with 727,172,808 being male and 698,498,544 being female. The population density of the country is 148.5074 individuals per square kilometer. The year experienced a negative population growth rate of -0.025%. Based on the most recent data, China is projected to experience a population decline of -629,267 individuals in the upcoming year. The projected population of China is expected to reach 1,425,178,782 individuals by 2024 (Data Base Earth, 2023).

Simultaneously, there is a persistent upward trend in life expectancy, leading to the inevitable consequence of population ageing and its implications for social expenditure. As a result, a substantial population inherently contributes to the acquisition of power; nonetheless, it does not imply the absence of accompanying challenges.

China's fast industrialization and urbanisation have resulted in substantial environmental degradation. The nation faces significant challenges in addressing widespread air and water pollution, deforestation, and the exhaustion of natural resources. The well-

known air pollution in major cities, such as Beijing, has emerged as a significant public health issue, resulting in a range of respiratory and cardiovascular ailments (Zhang & Crooks, 2018).

In light of these difficulties, the Chinese government has implemented measures to give priority to environmental sustainability. The Green Belt and the Blue Skies initiative strive to diminish pollution levels and advocate for the adoption of cleaner energy sources. Furthermore, China has established itself as a prominent figure in the international arena of renewable energy, namely in the domains of solar and wind power. The country has made substantial investments in research and infrastructure within these areas (Ren, 2019).

#### *3.4.1.2 Economic Power*

The issue that affects the status quo on the global stage is related to China's rapid development at a rate that tends to surpass the growth rate of the USA (CIA, The World Factbook, 2023). It is estimated that in the coming years, the country could significantly expand its capabilities (Alison, 2017; Parisi, 2011). According to Trump (Tankersley & Bradsher, 2018), the economy of the Asian dragon has experienced growth rates of 9–10%. Additionally, Rabinovitch (2018) reports that the annual output of this economy amounts to 11 trillion dollars. Garton (2011) highlights a reserve of 3 trillion euros, while Petropoulos and Chouliaras (2014) indicate a public debt of 9.4%. Finally after slowing to 3.0 percent in 2022, China's GDP growth is projected to rise to 5.6 percent in 2023, led by a rebound in consumer spending (WorldBank, 2023).

This economic progress has propelled the country from the 7th position in the global economies ranking in 2000 (Papasotiriou, 2013) to the 6th position in 2002 (Bessière, 2007), then to the 4th position in 2006 (Khatzigakis & Khatzigakis, 2010), and further to the 3rd position in 2007 (Leonard, 2008). Ultimately, it has become the world's second-largest economy, behind USA, with a 17,7 trillions US dollars (IMF, 2023).

China is home to the three largest banks in the world. It is a country that tries to provide as much economic aid as possible to several countries (up to \$2 billion per year) and increase foreign investments (e.g., participation in infrastructure projects) (Konstantopoulos, 2012). Its economy has a huge impact globally due to its current level of economic development, production, trade, consumption, and capital movement (Alagoz, 2018).

China's economic ascent has been characterised not only by its remarkable rates of expansion but also by its growing sway in global financial institutions. The nation's endeavours, such as the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB), have presented alternative channels for funding infrastructure projects. These initiatives have posed a challenge to the prevailing influence of conventional Western-led institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Jones, 2016, pp. 679-693).

Moreover, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a focal point of its economic diplomacy. The primary objective of this ambitious endeavour is to augment regional connectivity and promote economic collaboration across Asia, Africa, and Europe by establishing an extensive network of trains, ports, pipelines, and other essential infrastructure initiatives. According to certain calculations, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) might entail investments above \$1 trillion, solidifying China's position as a dominant force in the global economy (Kynge, 2019).

Nevertheless, possessing economic influence brings about heightened examination and obstacles. The increasing prominence of China in global markets has sparked apprehension on matters such as the misappropriation of intellectual property, unjust trade practices, and geopolitical frictions. The ongoing trade conflicts between China and the USA, which involve the imposition of tariffs and trade barriers, highlight the intricate and complicated nature of the global economic system in the 21st century (Swanson & Rappeport, 2019).

Undoubtedly, the impact of emerging economies within the BRICS group has been remarkable in recent years. The BRICS group, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has experienced substantial expansion in recent years, including the inclusion of Saudi Arabia. The expansion indicates the shifting dynamics of global economic collaboration and rivalry, highlighting the significance of emerging markets in reconfiguring international commerce and finance. By incorporating Saudi Arabia, there is a possibility of fostering fresh alliances and strategic associations, which could have an impact on global economic dynamics. The interplay between established powers like the USA and emerging economies such as China and the BRICS countries underscores the intricate nature of international relations in the contemporary era and emphasizes the necessity for stakeholders

to adeptly traverse these intricacies and discover collaborative resolutions for enduring expansion and affluence (Smith, 2023, pp. 45-60).

#### *3.4.1.3 Technological Power*

It would be erroneous to make the assumption that, despite China's significant advancements during the 1980's, it is destined to persist as a medium-tech power (Kynge, 2007). Through an increase in government funding for research and development (R&D) from 1.75% of GDP in 2010 to 2.20% in 2016 (Angang 2015, p.8-12), equivalent to 232 billion dollars (Mauldin, 2018), and the provision of incentives for major technology companies to establish R&D centers in Beijing, Shanghai, or other locations (Kynge, 2007), China has achieved the status of the world's second-largest contributor to research and development (Alagoz, 2018).

Furthermore, China has surpassed the United States in both patent registrations, with 225 compared to 91 in 2017 (Coy et al., 2018), and in the number of scientific publications, making it the leading country in this regard (Coy et al., 2018). Various fields, including biotechnology, space exploration, nuclear technology (Kynge, 2007), artificial intelligence (Coy et al., 2018), and the production of microcomputers (Bessière, 2007), televisions, motherboards, and car engines (Kynge, 2007), are currently undergoing a significant growth phase reminiscent of Japan's economic expansion in the 1980s.

However, China does not cease its actions at this point. The programme known as "Made in China" has drawn attention due to its focus on various industries such as artificial intelligence, aerospace, augmented and virtual reality, high-speed rail, shipping, and new energy vehicles. This initiative has resulted in specific concerns and areas of disagreement with Washington (Coy *et al.*, 2018).

China has emerged as a leader in technical innovation, namely in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), 5G technology, and digital payment systems. Alibaba, Tencent, and Huawei have emerged as dominant players in their respective industries, posing a challenge to Western IT giants and transforming the worldwide digital environment (Mozur & Zhong, 2020).



Furthermore, China's progress in quantum computing, a discipline with the capacity to transform other industries such as cybersecurity and drug research, has attracted global recognition. Alibaba and Baidu are making significant investments in quantum research with the goal of attaining quantum supremacy and revolutionising the limits of computer capabilities (Satariano & Mozur, 2020).

#### *3.4.1.4 Military Power*

China's massive military spending, investments in military capabilities, and efforts for military modernization are the main issues of international discussion regarding whether China's rise will be peaceful or threatening (Alagoz, 2018). The country's defence spending reaches approximately \$181 billion. It is the second country with the largest defence spending globally, with a rate of 10% in global measurements for 2019. From 2018 to 2019, China accounted for 14% of the total increases in defence spending amounting to \$82 billion, i.e., it had the second-largest amount of spending after America (Chapter Two: Comparative Defence Statistics, 2020). From 2017 to 2019, approximately 1.28% of China's GDP corresponds to its military spending (International comparisons of defence expenditure and military personnel, 2020).

China's military sector is considered likely to significantly increase its weapons in the coming years (Manzikos, 2020). It is known that it has a large number of both human resources and equipment in its army, which surpasses America in this sector (Chapter Two: Comparative Defence Statistics, 2020). The Pentagon report from the USA refers to plans for creating military installations abroad in countries such as Thailand, the UAE, Indonesia, and many others (Mantzikos, 2020).

It is evident that the Chinese military is presently experiencing a notable disparity in terms of both numerical strength and overall capability when compared to the United States ((Chapter Two: Comparative Defence Statistics, 2020). However, the possession of nuclear weapons by China does serve to partially mitigate the advantage held by the United States, as it establishes a form of deterrence sometimes referred to as Chinese nuclear deterrence.

China, despite its relative developmental delays, has undertaken a sustained effort over the past few decades to modernise its armed forces. This modernization process has involved a concurrent reduction in the size of its military forces, with the aim of enhancing its capacity

to fulfill its desired role as a regional power and eventually as a global power, emphasising flexibility and inter-sectoral capabilities (Humphrey, 2018).

The city of Beijing is progressively leveraging its economic influence to bolster its military capabilities, a phenomenon that aligns with the principles of Realism. China's military force is being demonstrated abroad through its recent military presence in locations that are geographically distant from Chinese territory, such as the Mediterranean Sea ((US DoD, 2023). One notable development is the establishment of the first Chinese military post located beyond the borders of China, specifically in Djibouti (Humphrey, 2018).

The Chinese leadership is actively endeavouring to transform the Chinese armed forces into a contemporary military apparatus, possessing the capability to safeguard the nation's interests in the Chinese Sea and other strategically significant regions. Within this particular framework, the anti-access/air-denial doctrine (A2/AD) has been formulated as a strategic response primarily aimed at countering the formidable American aircraft carriers and their associated combat units (Allison, 2017).

The overarching objective is to enable the Chinese armed forces, encompassing land, sea, and air domains, to achieve dominance in a potential conflict against the more advanced American forces within the broader South Asian region, ultimately resulting in the complete expulsion of the latter from said region. (Allison, 2017).

### 3.4.2 USA

#### 3.4.2.1 *Geography, Population, Resources*

The United States is the fourth-largest country in the world by land area (after Russia, Canada, and China). With its diverse natural environment, ranging from the Arctic to tropical climates and deserts, it offers a wide range of geographical features and abundant natural resources (Britannica, 2023). The fact that two oceans surround the United States is most significant because it offers both security through isolation and a secure connection to the rest of the world (Grivas, 2021).

The United States exhibits not just extensive land area but also encompasses territorial possessions and maritime boundaries, showcasing a remarkable range of geographical variety. The United States maintains control over many territories, such as Puerto Rico,

Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, each exhibiting distinct cultural, economic, and political attributes. In addition, the country possesses an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that spans over 11 million square kilometers, granting access to abundant maritime resources (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

The United States is currently undergoing notable changes in its population dynamics, which are marked by a growing elderly population, a rise in ethnic and racial diversity, and distinct patterns of movement across different regions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), the Hispanic and Latino population is expected to become the largest minority group, making a significant contribution to cultural and linguistic diversity.

While the total population is substantial, the population density is relatively low. The United States is characterised by significant population diversity, encompassing a wide range of ethnic, racial, and cultural elements, primarily resulting from substantial immigration. There are significant urban areas throughout the nation as well as sizable uninhabited areas. It maintains an economic life that is diverse compared to most other places on Earth, resulting in a high standard of living for the majority of its people (Britannica, 2023). In fact, the U.S. economy remains consistently strong, with its citizens enjoying various forms of innovation. According to J. Carter, even if America were to collapse, no other country could replace it (Ikenberry, 2012).

#### *3.4.2.2 Economic Power*

The nation's wealth reflects its abundant natural resources, extensive agricultural production, and highly developed industrial sector (Britannica, 2023). The American economy produces a quarter of the world's wealth (BBC Bitesize, n.d.). Imported oil in the United States accounts for over 50% of consumption, emphasising the significance of oil to the country's economic health (CIA, The World Factbook). However, it should be noted that the U.S. has the capacity to ensure its energy independence thanks to shale gas and oil, as well as self-sufficiency in raw materials and food (Grivas, 2021).

In details, the United States possesses a diverse range of natural resources, such as coal, copper, gold, and lumber. These resources have played a crucial role in promoting the industrial expansion and economic well-being. Furthermore, the nation possesses extensive agricultural territories that yield a wide variety of commodities, including maize and soybeans

in the Midwest, citrus fruits in Florida, and grapes in California. The United States is a prominent exporter of agricultural products, making a substantial contribution to its trade balance (USDA, 2022).

The industrial sector of the United States is highly advanced and characterised by a wide range of industries. It includes a broad spectrum of sectors, such as aerospace, automotive, technology, and pharmaceuticals. These sectors not only create significant income but also stimulate innovation and technical progress (USDA, 2022).

The advent of the shale revolution in the late 2000s has fundamentally altered the energy panorama in the United States. The United States has become a prominent producer of hydrocarbons because to significant breakthroughs in hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling technologies, which have enabled the extraction of abundant deposits of shale gas and oil. The augmented local output has diminished the country's dependence on imported oil and bolstered its energy security. Additionally, it has generated employment opportunities and fostered economic expansion in areas abundant in shale reserves (IEA, 2022).

Notwithstanding its robust economic prowess, the United States encounters obstacles such as disparities in income distribution, inadequacies in infrastructure, and environmental issues. It is crucial to tackle these problems in order to maintain sustainable long-term economic growth and prosperity (Brookings, 2022). The nation's prospective economic trajectory will also be shaped by worldwide patterns, technological advancements, and changes in geopolitical dynamics. Successfully adjusting to these transformations and cultivating ingenuity will be crucial in preserving its status as a dominant force in the global economy (Brookings, 2022).

#### *3.4.2.3 Technological Power*

Having unparalleled technologies in the military sector provides a significant advantage. In the realm of space, since 1990, the United States has been considered a superpower, given its fully developed space capabilities and high-tech, large-scale systems. These factors widen the gap with the rest of the world's powers, providing superiority to the country (Parisis, 2011). America possesses the world's most technologically advanced economy, with a per capita GDP of \$59,500. Technological progress is evident, particularly

in computers, pharmaceuticals, medical, aerospace, and military equipment (CIA-The World Factbook, 2023).

The unquestionable sovereignty of the United States is evidenced by its consistent introduction of innovations to its armed forces, bestowing upon them a distinct advantage over other global military powers. In order to comprehend the extent of this disparity, it can be said that the collective expenditures of all major powers in the realm of defence constitute just a minute fraction of the financial resources allocated by the United States. According to Papasotiriou (2009), it is noteworthy that the United States, despite allocating a mere 4% of its GDP, accounts for a substantial 43% of global defence expenditure. The United States possesses a formidable arsenal that is often regarded as the most potent in recorded history, enabling the nation to project its influence on a global scale.

The U.S. military is widely recognised for its exceptional technological expertise, demonstrated via the utilisation of state-of-the-art weapon weapons, intricate communication networks, and innovative cyber capabilities. The allocation of resources towards research and development has allowed the United States to sustain a superior position in comparison to possible opponents (RAND Corporation, 2022). The use of artificial intelligence (AI), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and advanced surveillance systems has fundamentally transformed contemporary combat, enabling improved accuracy, awareness of the situation, and operational efficiency (CSIS, 2022).

The establishment of the United States Space Force in 2019 highlights the nation's dedication to upholding its dominance in space. Equipped with a wide range of capacities, including satellite communications and missile defence systems, the United States holds a prominent position as a dominant force in the realm of space (Space News, 2022). The United States' position as a prominent space faring nation is strengthened by its investments in space exploration, commercial satellite launches, and space-based technology (NASA, 2022).

The United States' technological supremacy extends beyond the military domain, including diverse fields including information technology, biotechnology, and renewable energy. The economy, which is driven by innovation, draws talented individuals from throughout the world, encourages the development of new businesses, and stimulates economic expansion (MIT Technology Review, 2022). The partnership between the government, academia, and the private sector has greatly supported the advancement and

marketization of revolutionary technologies, strengthening the United States' role as a leading global centre for innovation (National Academy of Engineering, 2022).

Although the United States possesses a substantial technological edge, it encounters obstacles such as cyber security risks, technological rivalry from emerging nations, and ethical concerns regarding the deployment of advanced military technologies. Investments in research and development, regulatory frameworks, foreign collaborations, and altering strategic priorities will shape the future trajectory of U.S. technical dominance (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022).

#### *3.4.2.4 Military Power*

For the United States, military power is always a priority (Parisis, 2011). Militarily, one could argue that America remains the world's only superpower (BBC Bitesize, n.d.). The military capabilities of the U.S. are the most significant evidence of its hard power (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013). U.S. spending on defence is an element that underscores the magnitude of its strength. According to measurements, the United States spent the most on defense in 2019 with a total of about \$684 billion, or about 40% of global spending. From 2018 to 2019, in a global increase in defence spending of \$82 billion, the U.S. accounted for 47.9% of this total, nearly 50% of the increases in defence spending worldwide. From 2017 to 2019, approximately 3,11% of the U.S. GDP corresponded to its military expenditures (International comparisons of defence expenditure and military personnel, 2020).

Not to be overlooked is the fact that the U.S. predominates in terms of air force and navy equipment (Chapter Two: Comparative Defence Statistics, 2020) and possesses the world's largest naval fleet. Their aircraft carrier overshadows any other country (particularly in terms of size and technological capability), giving the United States the ability to establish military presence anywhere in the world (BBC Bitesize, n.d.).

The United States is dissatisfied with the way some countries exercise their military power (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013). That's why, in the formulation of the National Strategy for Weapons of Mass Destruction (2002), the U.S. Strategic Command stated that "the United States will continue to maintain the right to respond with overwhelming force and the use of available options in the event of a WMD attack against the United States and its allies."

Moreover, according to the 2022, USA National Defence Strategy “As long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States and other nuclear weapon states have a special charge to be responsible custodians of these nuclear capabilities and work with a sense of urgency to create a security environment that would ultimately allow for their elimination. Nuclear weapons have not been employed in more than 75 years. While ensuring our security, our goal is to extend this record of non-use and reduce the risk of a nuclear war that could have catastrophic effects for the United States and the world” (US DoD, 2022).

### 3.5 Discussion on the effects of China’s rise

The ascent of China, as was already highlighted, has significant implications for the geopolitical influence of the United States, particularly in relation to its standing as a leader both regionally and globally. China has proactively endeavoured to contest the leading position of the United States in the realms of economy, military, and ideology by presenting an alternative approach to the international community. China has effectively capitalised on the United States' limited presence in the region, which can be attributed to its sustained and focused endeavours in combating terrorism.

Consequently, China has endeavoured to fill the void of regional power. The facilitation of this endeavour has been rendered more convenient due to the United States' hesitancy to participate in international affairs following a prolonged period of conflict and instability within its own borders (Shambaugh, 2016).

Nevertheless, China was not able to take advantage of this situation and as the current global situation highlights is still far from being able to surpass USA global influence (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194; Till, 2016). Moreover, China has demonstrated its efficacy as an alternate economic model in contrast to the conventional Western economic paradigm. Over the last three decades, it has maintained an average growth rate of 10% while operating in a largely state-controlled financial system (Bergsten, 2008).

After Covid 19 China’s GDP growth is projected to rise to a 5.6 percent in 2023, led by a rebound in consumer spending. Growth will be led by a recovery in consumer demand, particularly for services. Capital spending in infrastructure and manufacturing is expected to remain resilient. Net exports are expected to weigh on growth, due to softer external demand

coupled with a modest acceleration in import growth reflecting improved domestic demand (WorldBank, 2023)

China economic approach holds appeal for numerous nations that have not experienced the anticipated advantages of the economic models endorsed by the United States and institutions supported by the West. As a result, China offers an alternative option for interested countries in terms of business partnerships, thanks to organizations like the AIIB and BRI (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2018).

China has also demonstrated a willingness to extend financial or military support to nations that have been excluded by international organisations due to their disregard for international legal principles and standards, including human rights violations and unfair electoral practices (Halper, 2012, p. xii). China, as a nation, is inclined to tolerate the transgressions of its authoritarian partners who are reluctant to make concessions to the United States, thereby providing them with a supportive alliance despite their non-compliance with international rules.

The preceding United States administrations have dedicated a significant portion of their time and resources to addressing terrorism in the Middle East, despite President Obama's proposed shift towards prioritising Asia. Consequently, China has capitalised on this opportunity to enhance its regional leadership in Asia (Tow & Stuart, 2015, pp. 17-18). The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) during the Obama administration was an endeavour by the United States to uphold its dominant position in the Asian region (Tow & Stuart, 2015, pp. 102-103).

The Trump administration's implementation of the "America First" strategy and its decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) have had a detrimental impact on the United States' position of leadership. The commitment of the United States to its alliances and its reliability in providing defence during times of crisis are being questioned by longstanding regional allies (Patrick, 2018).

On the other Hand, President Joe Biden assumed office with a bold U.S. foreign policy agenda encapsulated by his preferred campaign slogan: "America is back." Primarily, this entailed rectifying the harm inflicted to America's international reputation by his predecessor, Donald Trump. Throughout his four-year tenure, Trump significantly damaged relationships



with America's friends in Europe and Asia, escalated tensions with rivals such as Iran and Venezuela, and initiated a trade spat with China, resulting in the most strained bilateral relations in decades (World Politics Review, 2023).

However, China's confrontational behaviour in territorial disputes with neighbouring countries has resulted in a growing reluctance among these states to engage in cooperative partnerships with China (Till, 2016). Despite China's insistence that Taiwan is one of their provinces, it has been unsuccessful in fully asserting its authority over Taiwan.

In the absence of substantial military conflicts or domestic challenges, such as a potential collapse of the domestic economy, it is highly probable that China will persistently see growth in its strength during the forthcoming decades. In sharp contrast to Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "hide your capabilities and bide your time," China has recently adopted a more overt approach to challenging the United States, as noted by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2018.

In a public statement, President Xi Jinping expressed his belief that it is unwise for the international community to persist in the notion of compelling China to endure the negative consequences that would harm its own interests (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2018). China's rise has significantly boosted its economic and military might, along with a growing desire to take part in international affairs and challenge the influence of the United States. The United States' aspirations for fostering democratic and liberal values in China through economic, security, and diplomatic engagement have largely been unsuccessful (Jisi, *et al*, 2018, pp. 183-195)

### 3.6 Concluding arguments

The earliest aggressive moves exhibited by China lend credence to the notion of China's ascent being characterized by a lack of peaceful intentions, maybe aimed at supplanting the United States, as posited by scholars like Graham Allison. The aforementioned activities, in conjunction with China's failure to implement liberalization measures, appear to contradict the notion of China's peaceful ascent predicated on engagement as a catalyst for liberalization and the establishment of democratic principles.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the absence of noteworthy political or economic failures in China does not always indicate its inevitable ascension as a global powerhouse, surpassing the United States (Shambaugh, 2016). China has had significant economic expansion in recent decades, but this growth has started to decelerate and is expected to continue doing so (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2019).

China has just embarked on assuming a growing debt load, a development that has the potential to impact the nation's future economic growth and stability. According to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2018), China encountered a deficit in its accounts amounting to \$28.3 billion (USD) during the first half of 2018, marking the first occurrence of such a deficit in the past twenty years.

The Chinese economy is projected to achieve the government's growth target for 2023, indicating a robust recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. The forecast indicates that the real GDP would see a growth rate of 5.4 percent in 2023, followed by a decrease to 4.6 percent in 2024. This decline is expected due to the ongoing deterioration in the property industry and the reduced external demand. The predictions have been revised upwards by 0.4 percentage points for both 2023 and 2024 compared to the October WEO projections. This is owing to a better-than-expected performance in the third quarter and subsequent policy developments. By the end of 2024, core inflation is expected to rise to 2.1 percent due to the ongoing reduction in the output gap. In the foreseeable future, there is an expectation that growth will gradually decrease to approximately 3½ percent by 2028 due to challenges posed by low productivity and an ageing population (IMF, 2023).

On the other hand, The United States possesses a notable military superiority over China and allocates a considerably larger budget towards defence expenditures. In 2018, the United States allocated more than 3.2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) towards defence expenditures. In comparison, it is worth noting that China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) currently falls short of that of the United States, and its expenditure on defence in 2018 accounted for a mere 1.9 percent of its GDP, as reported by the World Bank in 2017. In spite of ongoing modernization endeavours, it is argued that China's military still lags behind the United States in terms of technological capabilities (Shambaugh, 2016).

Moreover, despite facing several challenges, the current trajectory of the United States does not definitively indicate a state of decline. The US continues to possess distinct

advantages in the areas of population, technology, and energy. In addition, there are other benefits associated with this phenomenon, including geographical factors and a prevailing culture that fosters entrepreneurship (Urban & Nye, 2018).

Based on the aforementioned reasons, the argument positing an over-exaggeration of China's development appears to be the most realistic, suggesting that the United States is likely to retain its position as the global powerhouse in the near future.

## Chapter 4 - Conclusions

A variety of factors influence the acquisition of power, which is a multifaceted phenomenon. Countries that possess significant economic resources and enjoy favourable circumstances have the highest potential for achieving dominance, primarily through the enhancement of their hard power capabilities. The United States, as an illustrative example, owes its current status as a nation to the astute integration of tangible assets within its strategic framework. By contrast, China has a higher susceptibility to potential challenges from neighbouring countries, lacks the potential to effectively compete with the United States, and threatened by a decline in its current level of influence in both Asia and the global arena.

The examination of historical transformations within the international system, spanning from the ancient city-states of Athens and Sparta to the era of Nazi Germany, reveals a recurring pattern wherein rising countries frequently endeavour to modify the prevailing order in order to align it more favourably with their strategic objectives. The ascent of China poses a unique and unparalleled challenge for the United States, as it is the sole nation that Washington regards as a possible adversary.

In relation to China's current aspirations, it is evident that Beijing is committed to avoiding any kind of war with the US government. However, it is important to acknowledge that China's pursuit of more power may potentially lead to frictions with other considerable Powers in the region, like Japan, South Korea, Australia, Vietman and India that they may turn to USA for support (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).For instance. These considerations are crucial in understanding China's ongoing efforts to consolidate and enhance its influence. However, it should be noted that the current level of modernization of the Chinese military does not pose a direct danger to the conventional and nuclear military supremacy of the United States (Grivas, 2021; Papatotiriou, 2013).

As Nye astutely observes, the United States' development as a global power in the late 19th century was characterised by a calm acceptance on the part of Great Britain, devoid of any armed confrontation. The anticipated impact of United States policies on China is projected to have a substantial influence on the trajectory of bilateral relations between the two nations. China poses a substantial challenge to the United States while simultaneously presenting noteworthy potential, particularly in the realms of economy and security.

The primary concern of Beijing is the United States' determination to maintain its dominant position and prevent China's ascent using any means necessary. In spite of recent endeavours towards collaboration observed during the administrations of G.W. Bush and B.W. Obama, Beijing maintains a perception that the primary objective of Washington is not fostering reconciliation but rather restraining the influence of China through international accords and encircling military strategies (Kissinger, 2012, pp 44-45). Since 2017, the Trump administration, with the agreement of both Republicans and Democrats in Congress, has adopted China's "containment" Strategy. President Biden in the content of the implementation of the deterrence strategy not only continued Trump's trade war but extend it to the technological sector too (National Security Strategy, White House, 2022), (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).

The United States expresses apprehension regarding the potential displacement by Beijing in Southeast Asia. The United States has engaged in three conflicts to safeguard its influence in the region and has expended substantial economic resources towards this objective (Mearsheimer, 2001) The warning that Thucydides gave about the effects and outcomes of the emergence of a new major global power is still relevant and valid. According to G. Allison, Thucydides trap will persistently serve as a catalyst for conflict as long as the international system retains its inherently anarchic nature.

However, in an international system characterised by the principle of "mutual assured destruction (MAD)" as the prevailing paradigm among nuclear actors, it is highly questionable whether there exist any incentives for a nuclear power to initiate a nuclear conflict, given the immeasurable consequences that would likely negate any potential gains it may anticipate. Given the objective unlikelihood or severe difficulty of attaining nuclear superiority, a significant deterrent to a nuclear power's inclination to employ nuclear weapons is the potential existence of a functional nuclear force on the opposing side, capable of mounting a retaliatory response (Mearsheimer, 2001; Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194). In conclusion the existence of nuclear arsenals makes the cost of war between the two countries, prohibitive, as long as disruptive technologies do not undermine nuclear deterrence (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).

The ascent of China has exerted a substantial influence on the global distribution of power, as it has strategically utilised its enhanced capabilities to challenge and erode liberal norms and principles. China has actively pursued avenues to make a positive impact on the

global system while simultaneously adapting it to align with its principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. China has also endeavoured to subvert the widely accepted Washington Consensus, advocating instead for a distinct Beijing Consensus that prioritises economic growth through political and economic reforms. The introduction of this novel concept has had a detrimental impact on the established norms and principles of the international system, since various nations are now pursuing assistance and financial support from alternative avenues (Huang, 2010, pp. 31-47).

The ascendance of China is anticipated to exert a constrained negative influence on the global system as it strategically employs its leverage to undermine established principles and standards, including those pertaining to human rights and democratic governance. Nevertheless, the potential impact of this phenomenon on the current global balance of power, as well as the United States and other international institutions, is expected to be rather limited. This is primarily due to the fact that China possesses a vested interest in upholding the prevailing state of affairs and lacks the capability to effect substantial and transformative changes.

Despite significant changes in the distribution of power around the world, a war confrontation between the United States and China is not necessarily inevitable. The ascending influence of China and the corresponding decline in American dominance are the main factors driving these changes. The occurrence of a catastrophic war between the United States and China is not an inevitable outcome, nor does it possess a high probability. However, it should be noted that the possibility of such a war cannot be definitively excluded in advance. If such a war were to occur, it is unlikely to happen in the near future. Instead, it can only be the outcome of deliberate strategic choices made by leaders who prioritise achieving a "victory theory" over their adversaries (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).

Power analysis indicates that constructing a believable "victory theory" for either of the two contestants is a challenging task. Therefore, it is anticipated that despite ongoing geopolitical, geo-economic, technological, and ideological competition between China and the US, they will be compelled to collaborate in addressing crucial matters that align their interests. These include preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and other forms of mass destruction, mitigating the impact of pandemics, ensuring environmental sustainability, and maintaining financial stability (Platias, 2023, pp. 81-194).

In conclusion, it is suggested that the US and China would want to avoid an impending confrontation if it meant preserving their economic relationship. Even though it will be challenging, diplomacy still plays a significant role for both the US and China as they strive to outdo each other on the world stage. This could end up working in their favour. The US will keep in regular contact with its Chinese counterparts to forestall any misunderstandings and, by extension, military clashes. By resolving their economic differences diplomatically, the US and China can also achieve progress. A confrontation between the two sides would be disastrous for both of them, so it's in their best interest to avoid it. To sum up, a military showdown between China and the US is not on the cards anytime soon; rather, a new era of long rivalry is on the horizon

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