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**SUMMARY**

**PhD THESIS**

**Chinese and American Global Rivalry. Is There an  
Unavoidable ‘Thucydides Trap’?**

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## INTRODUCTION

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 signified the end of the Cold War, resulted in the shift of the international system from a bipolar to a multipolar configuration, which is ongoing today, and has progressed swiftly through a phase of American unilateralism.

The United States of America (USA), as the sole remaining superpower after the Cold War, endeavoured to reshape the global system in line with a liberal order. This order prioritised the protection of civil rights and liberties and advocated for unrestricted international trade.

From 1991 to 2010, China rose to become the world's second largest economic power. During this time, the United States successfully engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The administrations in Washington had significant autonomy in shaping the international system, as there was no direct challenger to America's power. However, the economic crisis of 2008 profoundly disrupted the whole international system, creating an opportunity to question American dominance. Meanwhile, China, previously aligned with the USA throughout the Cold War, experienced an exceptional surge in strength after 1991 due to the economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, following the events of June 1989 and the subsequent period in the early 90s, during which China was regarded as an outcast nation that disregarded the rights and liberties of its citizens, it would gradually emerge as one of the foremost participants in the contemporary economic system. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001, facilitated by Washington, has enabled significant annual economic growth, thus increasing the likelihood of it surpassing Japan to become the world's second-largest economy by 2010. This will not only formally establish China's position as a second global superpower, but also mark the commencement of a compelling rivalry between Washington and Beijing.

The introduction of the pivot to Asia by the Obama administration in 2011 not only signalled a change in US foreign policy from Europe and the Middle East to East Asia, but also demonstrated Washington's growing concern with China's regional and global preparations for its ascent. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping initiated the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, which was later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This ambitious endeavour aims to foster economic connectivity between Asia, Africa, and Europe by investing in infrastructure and other related sectors. Beijing is challenging the model that the US has been using to construct the international system, positioning itself as a counterweight to the

American order. This challenges the prevailing perspective of how the Western world, particularly the United States, views global politics and prompts the member nations of the Group of Seven (G7), as well as other influential Asian countries like India, to seek remedies to counteract the growing influence of China.

The regional powers promptly responded by successfully reviving the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in 2017 and establishing the Australia-Great Britain-United States (AUKUS) security partnerships in 2021, both of which are focused on the Asian continent. By doing so, the United States and its neighbouring allies are effectively conveying a clear message to China that they are against its economic and military advancement. However, starting from 2015-2016, China has been actively constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea with the intention of exerting its dominance in the area. This situation is likely to incite a regional crisis, compounded by the ongoing conflict between China and Taiwan. Despite being historically connected as parts of the same country they have become different entities due to the 1946-1949 civil war in China. Nevertheless, the presence of these conflicts and China's rapid economic growth indicate its preparedness to assume the role of the USSR in a forthcoming bipolar system. Nevertheless, the existing configuration of the international system suggests the emergence of a multipolar system, characterised by an increased number of powerful actors at the global level. These actors may engage in collaboration or exhibit diverging interests beyond their present scope. Regional powers are actively rejecting and will persistently reject the American model of liberal order. Consequently, there is a high probability that we will witness a decline in the number of democratic governments worldwide, with a preference for authoritarian regimes.

Given the current geopolitical circumstances, the competition between the US and China should be regarded as a distinct sort of competition, contrasting significantly with the previous US-USSR competition that was characterised by numerous political, economic, and military disparities. Currently, China and the US engage in economic cooperation, with their economic models being somewhat comparable. Both countries endorse free enterprise and the principles of international trade freedom. Nevertheless, their political frameworks and international perspective do not align with this statement. As previously said, the two powers are currently competing in terms of future investment patterns on the global scale and the geopolitical viewpoint they will use to shape the future power allocation in Asia. The two powers have divergent perspectives on the meaning of development models in the field of technology. This pertains not only to the design and implementation of new technologies, but also to the financial aspects of these initiatives.

That is why economic and technological competition are intricately intertwined, as both nations want to establish a significantly greater portion of the market compared to their counterpart. Whilst Beijing may have a competitive edge in future technology advancements, China lacks a similar advantage in terms of its alliance system and global force projection capabilities. China's global representation of hard power is limited because to the absence of regional and international alliances similar to those of the United States, as well as the lack of a widespread system of military bases. Currently, China appears to be primarily focused on establishing itself as a dominant force in its region and thwarting the efforts of the United States to counter this ambition, rather than actively utilising its influence in other parts of the world through soft power strategies. In contrast to China, Russia emerges as a more proactive contender, as it has successfully engaged in direct involvement in Asia, Africa, and Europe whenever its geopolitical interests have necessitated it. Whilst China may possess a significant ability to participate in and shape global events, the leadership in Beijing does not now appear prepared to take on this responsibility. Its priority lies in furthering the growth of its robust economy before assuming a role as a global actor. Procrastinating in this situation may not confer a significant benefit in this particular situation.

This thesis aims to analyse whether the competition between the United States and China can lead to a Thucydides Trap, based on China's role as both regionally but also globally. To do this, we amalgamated the fundamental principles of international relations: the Thucydides Trap elucidated by Graham Allison, the aggressive neorealism expounded by John Mearsheimer, and the theory of power cycles proposed by George Modelski. I have established a connection between China's rise and the significance of attaining regional hegemony, whilst avoiding the formation of swing coalitions that could impede its progress in the Asian context. Simultaneously, we hypothesised that if a Thucydides Trap existed, it was highly probable that Beijing would attempt to establish its own power cycle. Consequently, we examined the feasibility of this scenario. The thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach by integrating several fields of analysis, including international relations, political science, economics, technology, military conflicts, statistics, and artificial intelligence.

# Hypotheses and methodology

## Research Hypothesis

This thesis examines whether the rivalry between the United States and China might lead to a Thucydides Trap. In order to accomplish this, multiple facets pertaining to this association are examined: including China's economic transformation following the conclusion of the Cold War, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the regional disputes in the South China Sea, the conflict with Taiwan, and the semiconductor rivalry between the two dominant nations. The central research idea that is explored and analysed stems from the geographical difficulties mentioned earlier. The strategic rivalry between the United States and China has the potential to result in the occurrence of a Thucydides Trap.

The primary research topic is therefore:

### **Is it possible for the US-China Rivalry to produce a Thucydides Trap?**

This inquiry will lead to a series of subsequent inquiries, which will include the following:

- Is there a potential for the economic conflict between the United States and China to grow into a military confrontation between the two dominant powers?
- Is China a potential global superpower in the near future?
- Is a prospective military confrontation between the two states considered a hegemonic conflict?
- Is the American power cycle approaching its end, as hypothesised by George Modelski? Should that be the case, will there be an extra power cycle?

Additionally, based on these inquiries, the subsequent research goals were established:

- Examination of the emergence and development of diplomatic, economic, and political relations between the United States and China;
- Exploration of how an economic conflict can escalate into a military conflict;
- Assessment of the primary geopolitical and geo-economic consequences that may result from the conflict between these two global powers;

- Analysis of the power transition process through the lens of power cycle theory.

In order to address these inquiries and research goals, the utilisation of Thucydides' Trap is employed, as elucidated by Graham Allison, in conjunction with two additional concepts derived from International Relations Theory: regional hegemony, a construct formulated by John Mearsheimer, and power transition, particularly the theory of power cycles advanced by George Modelski. In order for Beijing to endeavour to establish a fresh phase of dominance and supplant America as the global hegemon in the existing system, it must initially attain regional hegemony and thereafter instigate a Thucydides Trap. The Thucydides Trap refers to a situation in which two powerful states are on the brink of a global war, as articulated by George Modelski.

Under such circumstance, America may find it more convenient to establish and back coalitions that counterbalance China, such as the Quad and AUKUS, compared to China's ability to do the same. Conversely, China aims to identify favourable circumstances in order to impede the United States in its endeavour to form new regional alliances and increasing its engagement in regional affairs. However, the ongoing battles in the South China Sea and the tension with Taiwan have led the countries in this region to increasingly call for greater US engagement in regional politics. This measure will impede China's capacity to establish regional dominance and hence hinder its potential to emerge as the next global power, so preventing the perpetuation of a new power cycle.

## **Methodology**

This thesis employs both quantitative and qualitative data analysis to determine whether US-China competition will generate a Thucydides Trap. Content analysis is primarily employed to analyse the speeches of political leaders, particularly those made by Xi Jinping concerning China's foreign policy. It is also utilised to examine news articles pertaining to regional conflicts in the South China Sea, Taiwan, semiconductor competition, and Economic War. Moreover, content analysis is applied to official documents released by both countries or international organisations, as well as books and scientific articles in the fields of history, international relations, economics, or technology.

In general, a comprehensive examination is conducted on the research reports published by various institutions in the domains of international relations, economics, military analysis, or technology. These reports effectively present diverse facets of the issues investigated by the author, as well as future research prospects. Within this category, we will furthermore give the content analysis conducted on many web documentaries, reports, video analyses, and graphic analyses that depict the geopolitical landscape of East Asia and China. The content analysis will primarily focus on the overall context of the text or video material, rather than on quantifying the quantity of words related to the thesis topic. Hence, our focus lies in the content of the text and the impact of specific material on the relationship between the United States and China.

From a quantitative analysis perspective, various indicators are employed to assess the situation. These include gross domestic product (GDP), gross domestic product per capita (GDP/capita), purchasing power parity (PPP), the fleet sizes of the Chinese and American navies, the Chinese navy's activities in different regions surrounding China, military expenditures of China, the US, and Taiwan, the number of troops in China and the US, the market share of different companies in the 5G equipment market, research budgets of the USA and China, the number of patents registered in each country, and a comparison of China's military budget with that of other regional powers in East Asia. To track the changes in indicators like GDP, GDP per capita, PPP, and research budgets for the USA and China, we collected data from The World Bank website, [data.worldbank.org](http://data.worldbank.org). This website not only provided us with the required information starting from the 1960s, but also included graphs that effectively illustrated the variations in economic indicators between 2009 and 2022.

Therefore, from an economic perspective, 2009 marks the continuation of the economic crisis that began between 2007 and 2008, until the point when China overtakes Japan and becomes the world's second-largest economy. From a military standpoint, the year 2009 holds significant importance since it provides insight into the state of the Chinese armed forces, particularly the navy, prior to the acquisition of their first Soviet-manufactured aircraft carrier by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Therefore, all the economic data examined in this study will encompass the time period from 2009 to 2022, whilst complete centralised data for the year 2023 is unavailable.

Military analysis involves utilising data processed by the US military, derived from the intelligence collected from China, to assess the military capabilities of the country for the years 2009-2023. In order to assess the development of the AEP navy's military capacity, we



employed: The Annual Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China is a publication that is prepared each year by the Office of the Secretary of Defence whose primary objective is to analyse the key military developments in China, and The Military Balance by The International Institute for Strategic Studies for the years 2009-2023.

Within these documents information may be identified regarding China's recent geopolitical advancements, including the development of long-range missiles, the establishment of artificial islands, and details about the Chinese fleet, aviation, and infantry. Hence, the quantity of ships, their classification, and their progression inside the AEP were gathered from these records, enabling us to subsequently generate the corresponding graphs using the Excel software. It is important to highlight that there is a significant disparity between the data publicly reported by the Chinese Navy and the data estimated by the US military as being accurate. Therefore, whilst the Chinese navy acknowledged the presence of certain ships capable of carrying cruise missiles in a 2009 document titled *The People's Liberation Army, A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics* (The Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009), these vessels were not widely reported in American and British sources until around 2015. Due to this rationale, I favoured the American numbers since they were able to provide a more accurate representation of the real military capabilities compared to a number of Chinese reports.

In order to obtain the annual budget of the US military, we relied on The Military Balance publication spanning from 2009 to 2023. This allowed us to ascertain the progressive increase of China's military expenditure in comparison to that of the United States. Nevertheless, our findings indicate that although the Chinese military budget experienced growth, it failed to match the magnitude of the American military budget when measured as a proportion of GDP. In order to ascertain the extent of Taiwan's military budget expansion, I also utilised The Military Balance. This information enabled us to have a much more current understanding of the island's capacity to protect itself in the event of a Chinese invasion. Similarly, we employed The Military Balance to scrutinise the military capabilities of both the United States and China in the year 2009-2023. Based on this data, it is evident that the number of American troops is half that of the Chinese troops, rendering an American invasion of Chinese land highly unlikely.

The total number of patents for each nation was acquired with the database from The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), *WIPO IP Statistics Data Centre*, which

proved to be quite valuable as it presents patent statistics from the 1960s to the present. China demonstrated a remarkable evolution in this scenario, surpassing the United States in 2016 and further increasing their numbers when Washington applied technology penalties in 2019. This demonstrates China's emergence as a formidable force in technology, military, and economy, making it a distinct competitor compared to the USSR, which primarily posed political, economic, and military challenges.

In our analysis of the impact of technological sanctions on China's competitiveness, we referred to Thomas Alsop's article entitled *Mobile base station vendor market share worldwide from 2019 to 2022* on statistica.com. This article provided data on the market shares held by the leading manufacturers of 5G network equipment. However, due to the lack of confirmation from an official source, it is challenging to determine the accuracy of the data offered on this site. However, we utilised them to demonstrate that China has a high likelihood of maintaining its status as a power in technology, despite the United States' efforts to restrict access to Chinese technology in Western countries due to national security concerns. The research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate the influence of the US-China competition on international foreign policy.

## **Theoretical Relevance**

The development of economic liberalisation in the early 1980s, linked with the economic downturn in 2008, enabled China to emerge as the world's second largest economy. This transparency facilitated the growth of scientific prowess, strengthen military capabilities, and paved the way for the establishment of other global initiatives, including as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Thus, China's remarkable progress has placed the US in a position reminiscent of the post-Cold War era, resulting in the formation of an economic and technological rivalry between the two nations. Consequently, the objective of this thesis is to ascertain whether these conflicts have the potential to escalate into armed conflict and the repercussions on the international system.

Within this framework, the United States expanded its regional presence through the multinational alliances QUAD and AUKUS, while simultaneously providing military assurance to Taiwan. These efforts not only enhanced the United States' ability to restrict China in Asia, but also served as a warning to the Chinese leadership. It is also difficult to concede the idea that the United States will relinquish China's position as the prevailing force in the

global order. Consequently, it is highly probable that Beijing will actively seek innovative strategies to enhance its global power and influence. Employing warfare as a means to achieve such a rise in power would be a tactical error and may result in a shift in the political leadership in Beijing, as well as significant casualties among the population.

Considering this context, it is highly probable that the United States will seek to capitalise on the erroneous choices made by China. Alternatively, Washington has the ability to enforce additional economic and technological restrictions, so preserving its technological superiority over China. The primary objective of the United States is to impede China's capacity to establish dominance in East Asia and thereby preserve the equilibrium of power in this particular area.

In conclusion, this thesis will clarify how the power transition theory provides an explanation for the attainment of power transfer between the United States and China. Whilst it may be tempting to believe that Beijing holds significant influence in the international system, particularly in terms of its economy, the truth is that the United States remains a powerful force and has the ability to impede China's ascent. Beijing has put forward three international projects: BRICS, BRI, and Global Development Initiative (GDI), which demonstrate China's efforts to establish a new position on an international level. Within this framework, the research aims to ascertain the potential effectiveness of the containment policy implemented by the United States in the South China Sea, taking into account the escalating military expenditures incurred by the US. Despite China's lower apparent expenditure on arms projects compared to the US, this is seen as a potential danger to regional peace, leading neighbouring countries to be less inclined to form military alliances with Beijing. This thesis will examine how regional alliances can effectively counterbalance China and explore the factors that could potentially lead to a military war in the area. Last but not least, this thesis aims to ascertain if China's participation in rivalry with the US on the global stage would result in a shift in political regime or a growing inclination towards collaboration. If economic progress and foreign projects fail, it is highly probable that we will witness a political regime change or leadership shift in Beijing.

## **CHAPTER 1- THEORETICAL DELIMITATIONS**

The first chapter of this piece is devoted to the primary theoretical notions: Thucydides' Trap, offensive neorealism, and cycles of power. I began by studying Graham Allison's articles and book on the concept of Thucydides' Trap in order to simplify this concept for a lay reader. Next, I focused on the cases presented by the author, as well as other situations that were not included in the analysis. Through analysis, we have determined that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine aligns with the concept known as Thucydides' Trap. In this scenario, Russia, a dominant force seeking to preserve the existing regional order, perceived a potential threat from Ukraine's potential integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The second theoretical perspective discussed is offensive neorealism, specifically focusing on the notion of a regional hegemon.

We have analysed China's aspirations to establish hegemony in Asia, as well as the potential strategies that can impede this ascent through the formation of coalitions supported by the United States. Consequently, the likelihood of a regional confrontation instigated by China against the US and its allies is significantly higher than the potential occurrence of a Thucydides Trap. The final theoretical perspective we will discuss is the idea of cycles of power. This perspective examines how a growing power might establish a new cycle of power. Thus, we have discerned the primary phases involved in the establishment of a fresh era of authority, as well as the principal instances of authority cycles that have emerged over the course of history. I have included in the presentation both the underlying factors that lead to the formation of a new cycle of power and the various theories that examine the shift of power in the international system.

## **CHAPTER 2 - THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL SUPERPOWER**

The second chapter provides an account of China's ascent from the end of the Cold War to the present, emphasising its key conflicts in East Asia. Through analysis, we have determined the existence of a regional conflict in the South China Sea that can be categorised into two regional conflicts: one refers to the territorial dispute in the South China Sea caused by China's construction of artificial islands and the other one pertains to the tension between China and Taiwan. China, and the second being the conflict between China and Taiwan. In addition, I highlighted that the United States is very probable to employ a defensive approach

when it comes to artificial islands. This is due to the presence of numerous regional stakeholders that have a strong incentive to impede China's growth. Regarding Taiwan, the United States will likely provide direct assistance to the island because a takeover of it would pose a significant danger not just to Japan but also to the Indo-Pacific area. Moreover, the presence of the world's foremost semiconductor businesses in Taiwan compels the United States to intervene in order to safeguard one of the key drivers of the forthcoming technological revolution. We are mindful of the global rivalry arising from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an international project backed by China, as well as the impact of technology on the relationship between the United States and China. In the area of technological competition, the focus was on the competition arising from the advancement of semiconductors. We believe that this serves as the foundation for the progress of any future technology, ranging from artificial intelligence (AI) to 5G or Internet of Things (IoT) networks.

### **CHAPTER 3- US-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION**

The task of completing the geopolitical analysis falls to the third chapter, regarding the possible occurrence of Thucydides' Trap. Based on statistical data on military budgets, we have shown that both the navy's capabilities and the number of soldiers in the infantry of the two countries, it is imperative to avoid a military conflict between the United States and China. In the event that the United States were to engage in military operations against China in an attempt to hinder its growth, it is extremely probable that the United States military would experience a unsuccessful outcome due to China's geographical advantages and the significant number of soldiers that Beijing could deploy. Conversely, if China were to attempt a similar action, it is quite likely that they would be defeated, given that a conflict with the US primarily takes place at sea. Moreover, such an action would result in the formation of a coalition of many more countries in the region opposing China. Thus, the Thucydides Trap does not benefit any of the parties involved, and they should instead prioritise solutions that reduce tensions and preserve the existing state of affairs. The subsequent section of this chapter focused on the feasibility of a new cycle of dominance arising in the event that the United States and China were to fall into the Thucydides Trap. It is crucial to examine how the conditions given by George Modelski can be applied to a major power such as China in this particular scenario. I have regularly seen

that China fully meets only one of these characteristics, whilst achieving the others proves to be quite challenging. It is quite unlikely that a Chinese power cycle will occur in this scenario, considering that other US competitors in the global system are unlikely to tolerate being subordinate to Beijing. Due to this rationale, we encountered difficulty in envisioning the feasibility of a Chinese power cycle. However, we did not dismiss the possibility of a second American power cycle resulting from the new technology revolution.

## **CHAPTER 4- DEVELOPING A SOFTWARE APPLICATION FOR ANALYSING THE THUCYDIDES TRAP PHENOMENON USING FUZZY LOGIC AND FUZZY INFERENCE SYSTEMS.**

Chapter IV concluded with the introduction of a software application that employs fuzzy logic to evaluate the potential for the US-China competition to become a Thucydides Trap. Fuzzy logic has proven to be quite beneficial for this purpose, particularly due to its ability to construct variables with multiple degrees of truth, such as: very small, small, medium, large, and very large. These values can range from 0 to 1, which is significantly different from the binary mode that computers typically operate in. We have established many criteria that we consider significant in influencing the relationship between the United States and China. We incorporated specifically designed criteria with a specific magnitude to ascertain the potential occurrence of Thucydides' Trap.

The examination of the input variables indicates a high probability of a Thucydides Trap, as the output variable exhibits varying degrees of truth: very small, small, medium, large, and very big. By utilising fuzzy logic, the computer is able to simulate qualitative factors that are relevant to sociological questionnaires. This enables users to accurately assess the extent to which social events occur.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Beijing began to establish itself as a systemic challenger to the United States after 2010, when it became the second world economic power, despite the fact that the rise of China was difficult to observe during the 1990s. China demonstrated its capacity to be a formidable rival

to the United States, demonstrating its economic and scientific power on a global scale. Whilst not reaching the same level of strength as the USSR, China's influence is significant.

This increase in pressure led to a fundamental shift in America's foreign policy, redirecting its focus from the Middle East to East Asia. Simultaneously, the Trade War and the strategic rivalry between the United States and China have created the potential for the Thucydides Trap.

The aim of this research was to examine whether the competition between the United States and China may be classified as an instance of the Thucydides Trap. In an attempt to validate the hypothesis, I believed that it would be imperative to do a quantitative data analysis of the military, economic, and technological capacities of both powers. Based on the analysis conducted using this data, we have determined that the probability of a Thucydides Trap is rather low, and it is advisable for the US to refrain from engaging in any direct conflict in Chinese. The presence of a formidable infantry force over 1 million soldiers in Beijing, combined with its geographically advantageous terrain for defensive manoeuvres, renders any attempt to take the country unfeasible. However, being a nuclear power prevents the possibility of confining a military battle solely to conventional warfare.

The second research objective of this thesis was to investigate if the emergence of the Thucydides trap would result in the establishment of the first Chinese power cycle. If this were feasible, it would mark the first occurrence of a continental power undergoing a power cycle in the annals of world history. China's status as a continental power necessitates the allocation of a portion of its military and economic resources to safeguard its land boundaries in case other regional powers adopt a counterbalancing approach. It is challenging to forecast whether Beijing would possess the requisite resources to sustain its growth in the South China Sea and East China Sea in this particular situation. However, China lacks the ability to exert its influence in other parts of the world.

Currently, it lacks an extensive global network of alliances and military bases, with the exception of the one in Djibouti, which limits its ability to act in other regions of the world. The absence of assertiveness is a significant drawback when it comes to asserting one's own international agenda. Therefore, I held the belief that the presence of a Chinese power cycle does not necessarily imply that this power will undergo a phase of unipolarity. On the other hand, the emergence of a new power cycle is challenging to predict due to the intensive technological competition between the United States and China.

Creating a new political revolution in America that would establish a different world order from the current liberal order is likewise highly challenging. Essentially, following the conclusion of the American power cycle, there will be an extensive duration during which neither power will attain another power cycle.

Another perspective presented in this research is the development of a software application that utilises fuzzy logic to analyse the possibility of the occurrence of Thucydides' Trap. This approach, which diverges significantly from binary logic, enables the computer to construct a visual representation of certain variables that were previously seen as purely qualitative and incapable of being represented within the confines of binary logic, which is limited to 0 and 1. The new variables closely resemble those commonly found in questionnaires used in the social science, which aim to assess individuals' perspective of specific political, economic, and social matters. Fuzzy logic enables us to accurately represent various factors that define the relationship between the United States and China within the context of the Thucydides Trap. These factors include strategic interests, ideological disparities, state collaboration, power competition, cultural distinctions, economic rivalry, bilateral alliances and treaties, transnational challenges, and the potential for military conflict. However, the utilisation of these variables assumes that the researcher has created rules based on their expertise, allowing them to model the relationships between the variables according to their own preferences. The researcher has the ability to assign weights to each rule in the final system, allowing for a solution that closely aligns with the real-world circumstance.

Therefore, using SECONF, we have established that the risk of Thucydides' Trap occurring in the context of the US-China competition is significant. Therefore, it is imperative for both nations to actively pursue resolutions to prevent the emergence of a Thucydides Trap resulting from their competitive relationship. In addition, it is imperative for them to refrain from engaging in any military engagement, as a conventional war has the potential to escalate into a nuclear fight at any given moment.

Whilst it is challenging to forecast the future trajectory of the US-China relationship, the Thucydides Trap continues to play a significant role in determining their interaction. This competition has the potential to not only influence the future international system, but also to be regarded as one of the most significant events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, similar to the Cold War's impact in the previous century. Both powers should acknowledge and consider each other's capabilities, but it is crucial for both governments to prioritise the preservation of peace and the current condition of affairs. Regardless of whether it occurs or not, the Thucydides Trap



continues to be the primary notion that effectively characterises the relationship between two powers that are both engaged in economic collaboration and in military, technological, and economic rivalry.

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