

# Interpreting the Rise of China: Is a Peaceful Rise Achievable?

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# Thesis

Many international relations and political theories suggest that the rise of China can lead to military confrontation between the US and China. While the possibilities are many, If the two nations are able to outline their spheres of influence effectively, a peaceful rise of power and a multipolar world order may be realized.

# Background

- Thucydides Trap
  - predicts that when a current power is confronted by a rising power, war is most likely the outcome
- Power Transition Theory
  - international system is usually hierarchically ordered with a dominant power at the top that creates and sustains the international order.
- Institutional Theory
  - Institutionalists see institutions as the key to cooperation

# Specificities of the US-China Conflict

# Economic Rise of China

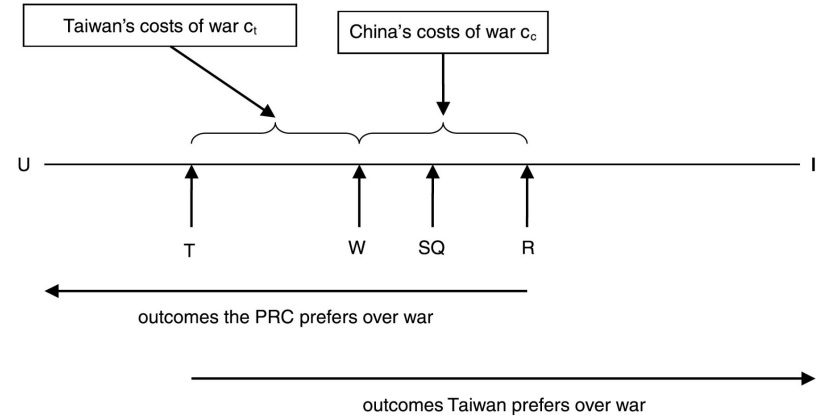
- In four decades China has reduced the percentage of population living below the poverty line from 90% to 1%
- 2004 the chinese economy was half the size of the US economy, in 2014 china's economy was equal to that of the US.
- Made in China 2025
- Belts and Road Initiative

# Territorial Disputes

## South China Sea



## Taiwan



# Alternative Multinational Organizations

- The Chinese government feels that the current level of influence China exerts in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank is not proportional to the strength it has in world economics.
- Failure to enact major governance reforms at the IMF and its frustration with the World Bank's incremental voting reforms has motivated China to create alternate institutions where it holds greater power.
- Facilitate China's desire to overthrow US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and give it an upper hand in territorial disputes in the region.

# Role of Nuclear Weapons

China and the US pursue different nuclear policies.

China - no first use policy

US - damage limitation

The US objective is to make China believe that if China triggers a conflict that risks nuclear escalation the US will have a higher tolerance to the risk involved as it has a greater ability to limit the damages. US's refusal to accept mutual vulnerability combined with development of capabilities and deterioration of bilateral relationship may encourage China to have a more ambitious nuclear strategy and give it more incentive to move away from the no first use policy.



# Declining US - China Relationship

- Cooperation between the US and Chinese leadership is crucial to stabilizing the relationship between the two countries
- The Biden Administration has an extraordinary challenge to manage the US-China relationship.

# Conclusion

The two countries may not be directly involved in a conflict but Chinese territorial disputes at the South China Sea and with Taiwan can bring the two countries in conflict. The US is keen to protect the interests of its allies in the region, especially Taiwan. China, on the other hand, is keen on displacing American influence in the region.

How peaceful the rise of China will be is dependent on how willing the US is to accept Chinese rise. If the two nations are able to outline their spheres of influence effectively, I believe that the rise will remain relatively peaceful.