

Sino-American Trade War: Implications for Global Peace and Security

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Abstract

This study investigates the implications of the Sino-American trade war on global peace and security. The trade tension between the United States and China is one of the issues perturbing the international system in current times. As a result, many studies have examined the Sino-American trade war vis-à-vis numerous issues but only few studies have looked at the implications of the economic conflict on global peace and security. Anchored on the linkage theory as propounded by James N. Rosenau, this study employs the case study research design and draws data from secondary sources such as journal articles, online newspapers, book chapters, books and so on. Findings of this study reveal that the Sino-American trade war has adverse implications for global peace and security as it has led to tensions and even a cold war between the two powers which involve the bolstering of weapons and military might. Citing the series of talks held between the two powers with little results, a mediation process must take place between the two countries, in which the World Trade Organisation (W.T.O.) must play the role of an impartial third party. This will ease the tensions between the two parties.

Keywords: America, China, Global Peace, Security, Trade War.

Introduction

International trade enables globalization and interdependence among states and non-state actors in the international system (Surugiu & Surugiu, 2015). In support of this argument, Dzaleva & Lazaroski (2011) explain that international trades as well as cross-border investments give rise to the integration of economies. This is against the backdrop of mercantilist policies which emphasized the projection of the state's economic power. Globalization liberalizes trade and political and socio-economic partnerships between states, giving room for development. While this is so, it cannot be ignored that international trade and consequently, the integration of economies creates room for ripple effects across the different economies of the world. That is, certain economic actions or postures by a state can present varying degrees of effects

for other economies of the world (Manolica & Roman, 2012; Zhang & Li, 2018). This is the case as regards the Sino-American trade war which is an economic conflict between two major economic powers of the world, the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. The trade tensions between America and China has not only created a new challenge to globalization but a challenge to the growth of the global economy. Accordingly, projections of African economic growth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were forcefully lowered from 3.3% to 3.1% largely due to the Sino-American trade war. The IMF also warned that the trade tensions will most likely cause a 1.5% drop in Africa's cumulative GDP growth by 2021 (Centre for Strategic & International Studies, 2019:2). The first segment of this study presents the introduction and general overview, statement of problem and research objectives of the study. The second section encompasses a review of literature and previous studies. The third section presents the methodology of the study. The fourth presents the analysis of data gathered in the course of the study. The fifth and final section presents the recommendations and conclusions of the study.

Statement of Problem

Numerous studies have been conducted on the Sino-US trade war. Kashyap & Bothra (2019) examines the implications of the trade war on trade between the United States (U.S.) and China. Kapustina, Lipkova, Silin & Drevaev (2020) investigate the direct and indirect causes of the trade tensions and makes predictions on note-worthy outcomes. Steinbock (2018) examined the global impacts of the trade war. While doing this, Steinbock (2018) looked mainly at the economic implications for the post-World War 2 international economic system. Bekkers & Schroeter (2020) present an economic analysis. Sun & Payette (2018) view the trade war as a struggle for survival between the two powers, forming the fulcrum of the study's analysis. Despite the abundance of these studies, only few studies have examined the implications of the Sino-American trade war, forming the problematique of this study. Thus, the objective of this paper is to investigate the implications of the Sino-American trade war on global peace and security.

Literature Review

The Concept of Global Peace

The concept of peace is at the forefront of relations and interactions between states and non-state actors in the international system. In accordance with this, Balogun (2017) asserts that the nations of the world work to maintain peace and security in the world where security threats prove to be more complex by the day. Additionally, the harsh implications and conditions generated by armed conflict or wars make the pursuit of world peace essential (Beyer, 2018). Be that as it may, the concept of peace suffers the absence of a universal definition. Corroborating this argument, Olanrewaju (2013) establishes that the simplicity of the term peace does not prevent the difficulty of providing a clear-cut definition, this is even more so in the field of international

relations. As a result, the term possesses a plethora of definitions with each embracing differing perspectives. Galtung (1967 cited in Olanrewaju, 2013) describes peace as a poignant concept of law and order which is only achievable through the instrumentality of force and/ or the threat of it. For Webel & Galtung (2007) peace is the fulcrum of harmony, equity and justice in every society. Peace is often construed to mean the absence of war. For Obikaeze and Iheke (2016) this stance is flawed as peace is not merely the strict absence of conflict but the non-violent transformation of conflict. From the foregoing, peace refers to a situation of harmony and justice in a society where individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations.

According Jarstad, Eklund, Johansson and Olivius (2010:6) to there are three notable approaches to peace and by extension, world peace. This includes the situational, relational and ideational approaches. Situational peace for Jarstad *et al.*, (2010) describes peace as a situation or prevailing condition within a society. More often than not, the situational approach to peace accompanies an individual or group's perception of war and conflict (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Koren-Silvershatz & Raviv, 1999 cited in Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013). Concepts such as democratic peace, constitutional peace and so on reflect the situational approach to peace. Furthermore, the absence of violence and fear of violence, freedom of movement, predictability, and institutions for the management and the resolution of conflict are basic features of situational peace (Jarstad *et al.*, 2010).

The relational approach to peace is actor centred. In this case, peace is made a reality by the non-violent interactions of actors, either at the national or transnational level (Jarstad *et al.*, 2010). An instance of this is the negotiation process embarked on to secure peace in war-torn societies; the ability of the actors to interact and reach a consensus on the subject matter eventually dictates the trajectory of the conflict and ultimately determines the peaceful settlement of the same. The last approach to peace is the ideational approach. For Jarstad *et al.*, (2010), the ideational approach perceives peace from a constructive perspective, whereby the ideas about what peace should be or is shapes policy, builds institutions and informs the decision making processes of political actors and institutions.

The adverse nature of wars has forced actors in international politics to strive to maintain peace. This is seen in the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 which brought an end to the thirty years' war (Patton, 2019). The treaty placed sovereignty as a tool to assure peace among states in the international system, with the hope that each actor will respect the right of another to conduct its affairs as it so pleases. As the world moved beyond the Westphalian era the world saw for the first time the horrors of a global war, the First World War. As Cameron (2014) admits, the horrors of the Great War promulgated an impulse to Christian socialism with the rallying cry, never again. This brought about the League of Nations (LON) in 1920, which was a formation of the victorious states in the war who were seeking peace (Yurtsever & Hmaidan, 2019).

The purpose of the LON was to promote international co-operation, peace and security. The League however failed to achieve this when a Second World War erupted in 1939 (Yurtsever & Hmaidan, 2019). By the Second World War, the world was confronted with the rise of Nazism which saw gross human rights violations including the holocaust (Catherwood, 2014). Following WWII was the formation of the United Nations which represented another attempt at collective security, an apparatus for achieving peace and international co-operation. Additionally the UN was set up to save succeeding generations from the horrors of war which had already occurred twice (Yurtsever & Hmaidan, 2019). Worthy of note is the fact that despite the formation of the United Nations and its mandate for peace, the world has not been without series of conflicts which have in recent times taken the shape of civil wars which in some cases are as a result of religious or ethnic divisions, war against terrorism and so on (Ugarriza, 2008). The United Nations is however created with a security council that has the mandate to take measures against conflicts that constitute a threat or breach of peace in the international system. As seen in the United Nations Charter, Chapter VII, Article 39:

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The Concept of Global Security

The concept of global security also suffers the same fate as global peace; the absence of a universal definition. However, understanding the concept of security calls for a clear explanation of the term as envisaged by scholars. According to Afolabi (2015:1) security denotes the freedom from threats and harmful circumstances whereby individuals, groups and even states can maintain their independent identity against hostile forces. The term security is applied to a variety of issues and as such, means a number of things in different contexts. Human security, economic security, health security, personal security, environmental security and so on, are the various manifestations of security (Afolabi, 2015). Global security is also a distinct manifestation of security. Afolabi (2015) explains the term as the efforts and procedures put in place by states and non-state actors (including regional bodies and international organisations) to ensure mutual defence and survival of all actors. The concept of global security otherwise known as international security has three areas of focus: geopolitics, non-traditional threats and the security of human rights (Siddikoglu, 2016).

Within the foray of international relations, geopolitics forms the salient interests of states as well as non-actors. This is evident in the Syrian civil war which has seen international and regional backers for each side in the conflict. These actors perceive the Syrian war in different ways, ultimately as a key towards upturning the balance of

power in the Middle Eastern region and extension of influence (Tan & Pereudin, 2019). Geopolitical interests constantly create threats in the international system as military tensions are on the high in such situations (Global Risks Report, 2018). Be this as it may, threats are ever dynamic as they change according to times. During the cold war, the threats revolved around the proliferation of nuclear weapons by the opposing blocs. From the perspective of the western powers, a formidable threat during the cold war was communism as propagated by the now defunct USSR (Anna & Weller, 2019). Threats of the 21st century, the post-cold war era are quite different. According to Amonson (2018:2), the foremost threats confronting the world in recent times include the proliferation of nuclear weapons, transnational terrorism and environmental degradation. Worthy of note is the fact that the nature of threats determines the posture and reactions of states in the international system. The United Nations (UN) represents a notable attempt towards ensuring global security. This is encapsulated on one of its objectives, which is to maintain international peace and security (Ibrahim & Haruna, 2014).

International Trade, Global Peace and Security

The flow and/ or exchange of goods and services across the states of the world and other forms of economic partnerships are often referred to as international trade (Bjelic, 2008). According to the phenomenon of international trade, it consists of three main categories: international trade operations which involve the transference of goods and services across boundaries, strategic alliance which denotes alliances between parties with common economic interests and direct foreign investments which refer to the process of controlling ownership of a business or investment in one country from another (Terzea, 2016). International trade is however not of recent development, the ancient Greek city states embarked on the exchange of goods, services and the movement of people across boundaries. As Cartwright (2018) explains, goods could be bought and sold in one part of the Mediterranean which had their origin in a completely different region. Despite this, the origin of foreign trade in its modern context is usually traced to the liberal reactions to the mercantilist policies and actions of states. According to Dorobăț (2015:110) the work of Adam Smith titled *The Wealth of Nations* produced a comprehensive critique of mercantilism. This laid a foundation for the theory of international values which emphasized the need and dynamics of international trade (Dorobăț, 2015).

International trade is of immense benefit to states and even the international system at large. According to Sun & Heshmati (2010:1) international trade facilitates the growth of the international economic system through capital accumulation, industrial structure upgrading and so on. Furthermore, Thompson (2007) establishes that a salient benefit

of international trade is the manner and ways it improves wage rates and in turn reduces poverty rates in previously low income countries. Corroborating this argument, Pettinger (2019:1) explains that international trade raises standards of living, improves employment opportunities and creates room for specializations. On the whole, international trade is of immense benefit to states.

A number of studies including Kara (2008), Lee & Pyun (2009), Hiller (2015), Amavilah, Asongu & Andres (2018) have examined the implications of international trade for global peace. Transnational trade creates a situation of interdependence and strategic partnerships between states and non-state actors in the international system, ultimately serving as a conduit for peace (Lee & Pyun, 2009). In congruence with this, Kara (2008:2) cites the European Union as a peace project, entrenching peace in the relations of all powers in the regional bloc. There exists a nexus between global trade and security. While this is so, there have been debates as regarding the relationship between the two concepts. Normatively, peace is the resultant effect of trade (Kara, 2008). This position is however challenged by the mercantilist school which takes the position that international trade is encouraged without considering the implications on national security (Kara, 2008). In light of this, explains that countries which rely on imported weapon systems and other materials for defence can have their supply or imports cut off by advance nations thereby making the country vulnerable to invasion. This can lead to conflicts between states, perturbing international peace and security.

Sino-American Trade: Overview

For long, the United States of America (America) and China have embarked on trade relations. The two powers have constantly traded goods such as telephones and cellular network materials, automatic data processing machines, tricycles, communication instruments, games, aerospace equipment, soyabeans, vehicles, oils and so on (Martincevic, 2019). According to Xu (2001:239) trade between China and the United States of America began in 1979 with the exchange of goods and services between the two countries amounting to 2.45 billion US dollars. By 1990, this had grown to about 11.27 US billion dollars in trade (Xu, 2001). During this eleven-year period, the American FDI in China cumulated at 2380.44 billion US Dollars (Xu, 2001:239). Trade relations between the two countries steadily grew from 11.77 billion in 1990 to 85.42 billion US dollars in 1999 (Xu, 2001:239). By the turn of the century and in the early 2000s, trade between the two countries had improved exponentially, with the volume of trade for the year 2000 tagged at 116.1 billion dollars. Trade between the two giants continued to grow, reaching as high as 456.8 billion dollars. By 2016, Sino-American trade witnessed a downturn as the volume of trade reduced to 578 billion as opposed to 599 billion Dollars of 2015 (United States Census Bureau, 2020:1). As at July 2020, Sino-American trade had fallen to 280.3 billion dollars (United States Census Bureau, 2020:1).

A variety of issues have confronted bilateral trade ties between the two countries. According to Morrison (2018:1), a variety of issues have hampered economic relations and trade between the two countries. From the American perspective, China's incomplete transition to a free market economy has been troubling. Despite China's attempts at liberalizing its economy in the past three decades, the US holds this perspective, due to the existence of certain state-directed policies that affect trade flows (Morrison, 2018). Another issue troubling the United States is China's continued espionage against US firms and other activities (Morrison, 2018). The Chinese industrial policy is one that seeks to re-innovate ideas and innovations from around the world. For this is achieved through state-sponsored IP theft, evasion of U.S. export control laws, piracy and other issues (White House Office of Trade & Manufacturing Policy, 2018). This and many more issues are instrumental in the eruption of a trade war between the two countries.

In the words of Kapustina, Lipková, Silin, and Drevaev, (2020:6), the trade war between the United States and China began on the 23rd of March 2018 after President Donald Trump of America signed the Presidential Memorandum Targeting China's Economic Aggression which imposed tariffs on Aluminium and Steel. This was motivated by the protectionist policy and posture of the Trump Administration as advised by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Steve Mnuchin and others (Steinbock, 2018). In response the Chinese government imposed tariffs ranging from 15-25% on 128 products from the US. These products include fruit, wine, seamless steel pipes, pork and others. This was followed by a list of 1,334 proposed products subject to a 25% Tariff between April and June of 2018 by the United States Trade Representative (USTR). In similar fashion, the Chinese government also released a list of 106 products that it intended to apply tariffs on (Wong & Koty, 2020:1).

Retaliatory tariff impositions continued until May 3rd when the United States and China held talks to resolve the trade dispute. However, this ended in a deadlock as no resolution was reached. Briefly, there was a glimmer of hope; while President Trump showed leniency towards ZTE, a Chinese technology company, the Chinese government announced that it will stop tariffs imposed on US sorghum. This truce was however ended abruptly when the US reinstated tariff plans on May 29th 2018 (Wong & Koty, 2020). Subsequent days witnessed reductions in the proposed list of goods that had tariffs imposed on them. The US reduced its list from 1,334 products to 818. Despite this, China invigorated its tariff imposition and added 545 products to the list. The Chinese government also announced a second round of 25 percent tariffs on a further 114 products (Wong & Koty, 2020:1).

Theoretical Framework

There exist a good number of theories including Games theory (Neuman & Oskar, 1944) and Realism (Morgenthau, 1948). Despite this, the study adopts the linkage theory as its theoretical framework. The linkage theory is one among the multiple theories that explain political phenomenon both in national and international politics. According to Crump (2009 PAGE NUMBER), the linkage theory explains the ways and methods by which one of more events affect another. This assertion builds on the position of Feld (1968), Rosenau (1969) which explains that the linkage theory depicts any sequence of behaviour or action which occurring in one system, is responded to in another. The idea behind the theory builds on the concept of linkages between events where by one reacts to the activities of another. In the plethora of applications, it is noticed that the theory explains negotiations, national-international events and so on. Prior to the development of this theory, scholars held that the realms of national and international politics were different and isolated from each other. However, for James N. Rosenau this was not so. Rosenau in his work highlighted that internal and external variables in the realm of politics are affected by each other (Rosenau, 1969).

Within the scope of the linkage theory, the Sino-American trade war is not isolated from the realm of trans-national politics. This is so considering the fact that the trade war has generated ripple effects in the international system. According to Steinbock (2018) one of the numerous implications of the Sino-American trade war is the global innovation rivalry of which America and China are at the forefront. In this case, the American government is trying to sustain the country's primacy as the innovation hub whereas the economic realities do not support this activity.

Research Methodology

This research employs the exploratory research design to investigate the implications of the US-China trade war on global peace and security. It utilizes thematic analysis to analyse data retrieved from secondary sources such as books, book chapters, journals and online newspapers.

Implications of the Sino-America Trade War on Global Peace and Security

The ramifications of the US-China trade war are severe though not immediate. The continuous retaliatory measures and actions of both parties in the economic conflict are not only averse to each other but affect their respective trading partners. Yadav (2018) explains that countries like India, Canada and Mexico might be affected by the policies of the U.S. towards China, countries that the Trump administration does not seem to consider in its "America first" protectionist policies. Furthermore, the administration seems to have no consideration for the reactions of the allies to the trade war especially, considering its adverse effects on their economies. This in many ways can alter the peace and stability of the international system.

There are also risks of a new cold war arising from U.S.- China trade tensions which can come along with threats of a nuclear war and unhealthy competition among the

two countries and their allies, bringing memories of times that shook world peace. Already, the world is seeing a rise in anti-china sentiments and rhetoric coming from the United States, particularly the Trump administration. Former white house strategist Steve Bannon once described China as the greatest existential to the United States in recent times (Alaca, n.d.). This has resulted in punishment and blacklisting of Chinese industries (Dlouhy & Sheilds, 2020). The countries are gradually veering into diplomatic rows with the United States of America ordering the Chinese consulate in Houston to cease activities. This is based on the belief that the consulate engaged in stealing millions of dollars' worth of US intellectual property (Gladstone, 2020).

An armed conflict between the two powers as a result of the cold war, may not be immediate, but seems to be a long term possibility. This is due to the uncertainty as to how far the countries will go in their retaliations against each other. The United States has however, strengthened its military presence in China's neighbours. As a follow up, the Chinese military has also built up its military arsenal (Xijin, 2020). The pentagon in September of 2020 identified that China has built up its navy to be the largest in the world, following attempts to beef up its capabilities in face of worsening tensions with the United States. According to Lague (2020:2), the U.S is also equipping warships with missiles such as the Tomahawk cruise missiles in addition to its plan to deploy long range and ground launched missiles to the Asia-Pacific Ocean.

From the preceding, it can be asserted that the trade tensions between the U.S. and China are already witnessing the development, displaying and stockpiling of arms and weapons by both parties. The world has seen this before, during the cold war between the U.S.A. and Union of Soviet Socialists Republic; as a lengthy struggle which involved a nuclear arms race between the two powers (Bessonova, 2010). The potential destructions that nuclear weapons could cause led to the creation of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), an office charged with the function of promoting nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Won-Soo, 2020). The actions of the United States of America and China with regards to the display and bolstering of weapons is however undoing the years of effort contributed by the United Nations through the UNODA and other actors in the international system. On the whole, the Sino-American trade war is inimical to peace and security in the international system.

Conclusion

This study investigates the implications of the Sino-American trade war on global peace and security. The Sino-American trade is an economic conflict between two major economic powers of the world, the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. The trade tensions between the two countries have not only created a new challenge to globalization, but other note-worthy implications. Findings of this

study reveal that the Sino-American trade war is inimical to peace and security in the international system as it has led to tensions and even a cold war between the two powers which involve the bolstering of weapons and military might. The inability of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China to come to a workable consensus or agreement after series of negotiations is to blame for the increasing tensions. Be this as it may, there is need for mediation to take place, to encourage the two parties to reach a workable solution, thereby reducing the build-up of tension. Being that states of the international system cannot be impartial due to salient national interests, the World Trade Organisation must serve as the third party in this mediation process. It must be able to play the role of an impartial third party in this case, to encourage the two giants to reach a workable agreement and by extension, preserve the peace, stability and security of the international system.

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