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INTR9918 International Relations Research Thesis

**THE US-CHINA TRADE WAR: DISSECTING
THE ROLE OF SUPREMACY BATTLES AND
CHINA'S REACTIONS AND COUNTER-
MEASURES**

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to dissect the US-China trade war and determine the underlying factors in the impasse. There have been numerous assumptions previously made about the factors promoting the war with a larger percentage of the blame being directed on trade-related issues. The trade-related issues in this case are the actions by China that the US believes are not appropriate such as trade deficits, among others. The US has imposed trade tariffs on Chinese imports as a weapon to sustain the trade wars. In this research, it was necessary to investigate factors such as political, economic, and technological supremacy and link them to the trade wars. This is because there have been trade wars in the past between China and the US without any benefit. Therefore, the assumption is that the US cannot be repeating the same thing without positive returns. It is then panned on the question of whether there are other issues that the US is pursuing but all are camouflaged in the trade wars. Moreover, the research reveals the reactions and countermeasures taken by China in response to the trade wars instigated by the Trump administration. The research bases its problem statement on protectionism as the genesis of the trade wars. However, it is evident that both China and the US have applied protectionism in different aspects especially in relation to the attainment of their personal interests. The study concludes that supremacy wars in political, economic, and technological spheres contribute to the conflict as the US believes that China is becoming dominant in these areas, which is a risk to the global geopolitics and the status quo. However, even at the height of the US aggression, China has remained calm and has shown interest in exhausting diplomatic approaches to quell the conflict and retain the economic cooperation that the two leading economies have been enjoying across the years. The Thucydides's Trap thesis is applicable in this case, and China has realized the importance of escaping the trap to avoid military confrontations with the US. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the US-China trade wars are not mainly about

trade issues but they are about the historical tension that has been existing between the two antagonists whereby the US is more focused on using coercion to contain China and prevent its peaceful rise because of its potential to shake the global power balance.

Key words: US-China trade war, trade tariffs, political, economic, and technological supremacy, Trump administration, Thucydides's Trap, coercion, global power balance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The relationship between China and the US has been studied widely over a long time due to the interesting relations they have had over time. The economic relations between China and the US have been on the rise in the past three decades with their mutual total merchandise trade increasing from \$2 billion in 1979 to \$579 billion in 2016 (Li, He & Lin, 2018). An interpretation of this evidence indicates that the growth in trade between the two countries has been tremendous, and thus, implying that the two have been enjoying a cordial trade relationship. Although the authors do not create a comparative analysis of the trend in revenue growth with other global economies within the same period, it is indisputable to state that the two countries have benefited greatly from bilateral business relations between them. Moreover, further evidence indicates that China is ranked second in the list of US' merchandise trading partners, the largest import market, and the third-largest export market to the US (Li, He & Lin, 2018). This shows that China plays a key role in the economic progression of the US as either an export or import market. Moreover, the US imports lower-cost products from China, which benefit consumers in the US. This is the real essence of bilateral trade, especially, when all the involved parties obtain various benefits from the partnership. To add to these arguments, Morrison (2017) asserts that China is ranked second in the list of the largest foreign holders of US Treasury securities. This indicates the extent to which China plays essential economic role for the sustainability of the US. The trade relationship between China and the US does not end here.

Even though evidence indicates that there has been positive progress in the relationship between China and the US over many decades, the Trump administration tends to shift the focus from positive economic relations to trade war. Trade war with China has been a public

narrative in the US since when President Trump was campaigning for presidency a few years ago. Trade war between China and the US has attracted the attention of scholars and economists in equal measures as one on the positive trade relations to have ever existed between the two most advanced economies in the world. According to Liu (2018), a trade war between China and the US has been in the public debate since March 2018; however, it was officially confirmed and launched on the 6th of July 2018. There are various theories linked to the genesis of the trade war but they have not been fully addressed in the literature. Hence, it would be a noble thing to pursue more theoretical analysis of the current situation for formation of hypothesis that will be tested in the future research. Furthermore, development of more theories on this issue is encouraged to enable formulation of predictions on the future happenings between these two leading economies. It is also believed that more theories are arising with time that will help to solve the mystery. For instance, among the existing theories on this issue, Liu (2018) argues that the 'Made in China 2025' plan is the greatest factor spewing the trade war. According to the author, this is an economic empowerment plan by China to improve the competitiveness of its manufacturing process to attain global dominance in manufacturing as also mentioned by Morrison (2018). The 'Made in China' initiative has been widely researched and findings presented in the literature. Wübbeke et al. (2016) argued that by adopting this economic initiative, China aims to be a global powerhouse in the manufacturing technologies. The US Chamber of Commerce (2017, p. 9) adds to this evidence by stating that the plan is aimed at enhancing localisation of manufacturing processes in China, promotion of domestic brands and innovations, and reliance on smart manufacturing technology. The US seems not to be pleased with this initiative; thus, the belief that it is necessary to impose coercive interventions to contain China's dominance and rise as a global economic superpower. This is another theory that can be used as a background to explain the genesis of the trade war between China and the US.

The dispute between China and the US is intensifying as more views on trade wars are presented through global media sources. However, the media reports cannot be substantiated like in the case of black and white literature. Even in line with reports of mutual dependence and growing economic relations between the two countries, the bilateral disputes are steadily rising. Each of the two sides of the antagonistic relationship lays blame on the other side. For instance, according to Liu (2018), the accusations against the US by China are unfair treatment of their market economy status, imposition of restrictions on Chinese high-technology products, and unwarranted trade sanctions on its exports. On the other hand, the US has accused China of failure to enforce intellectual property rights, immense trade surplus, unclear record on implementing the WTO obligations, and discrimination in innovation policies (Liu, 2018). These seem to be genuine concerns being presented by both parties that should be solved expeditiously via diplomatic approaches. However, there seems to be a problem in arriving at a long-lasting solution especially after Trump ascended to power. Trump declared trade war against China during the Presidential campaigns, and he has already revealed the intentions of enforcing the threats as evidenced by his recent actions. Observers believe that the trade war threat by the Trump administration might not be a mere farce but it might take place in the future if it doesn't happen right now. According to Liu (2018), the outcomes of the US—China trade war may not be appealing but it is always necessary to carry out research on the impact of possible trade wars that might take place in the future. Such types of research are relevant especially when approached from a policy development point of view.

There are various outcomes that can be associated with the broken relationship between China and the US. Some of the outcomes of the past engagements are part of the history but there is no assurance that there will be a repeat of the same outcomes. Outcomes are likely to be unique to the current situation due to the changing dynamics in global world order under

the direction of the US as the world's hegemon. The likelihood of there being military engagement between China and the US can be dissected from the perspective of Allison's (2018) Thucydides's Trap thesis that demonstrates the chances of there being military engagement between the rising power and the already established hegemony. In this case, China is the rising power while the US is the hegemon. According to the Thucydides's Trap, escaping the Trap means avoidance of war but getting trapped means engagement in military engagement. Hence, viewing the situation from this perspective is essential as it will help to make conclusions on the likely outcomes and whether the perceived outcomes can influence a change of tune and retraction of aggressive approaches that the US is currently applying.

1.2 Research Problem

The area of research is primary the US-China trade wars, which is widely known as the US has already publicly declared and it has already started to aggressively implement it through imposition of trade tariffs on Chinese imports. However, there is another secondary part of this research area that aims at dissecting the situation objectively to determine the real factors promoting the trade wars. In this case, it is also important to justify the countermeasures adopted by China to deter the offensive being propelled by the US. The available literature on the US-China trade war is very limited and the research approach used by the previous authors is mainly analytical. However, it is sufficient enough to lay the platform for evaluating the research problem and some of the background information needs to progressively pursue the research. The Ikenson (2017) study was on the likelihood of China-US trade war happening in 2017 or later. The prediction is slowly taking shape as the trade war was triggered in mid-2018 by the Trump administration. This is an appropriate study that laid the background of the research process into the initially predicted trade war between China and the US. Hence, it was a relevant study at that time, and it is still relevant in the present context because it can be used as a reference point for pursuing this research. Lazard

(2017) applied the emerging market perspective to explore the nature of the relationship between the US and China under the Trump presidency. This study based its analysis on the threats that were initially made by Trump aiming to impose a 45% tariff on Chinese imports alongside accusing China of lowering the value of the renminbi as a strategy of boosting the Chinese exports. These are grave accusations against a single rival that has been earmarked as a potential threat to the world order. However, Lazard (2017), at that time, questioned the ability of the US to implement these measures and the benefits of the actions to the US economy. During the same year Morrison (2017) analysed the trade relations between China and the US and evaluated the ability of there being a trade war between the two countries in the near future. This was a research problem at that time but it has been confirmed, and the current research focuses on the possible causes and outcomes of the trade wars. It is also important to add the measures that should be taken by both countries in addressing the trade wars. Again, these knowledge gaps form the current research problems and there is hope that they will be solved objectively. Schell and Chairs (2017) analysed the US policy on China, and gave recommendations that should be considered by the new administration. This might not be part of the current research problem but they might be depicted in the countermeasures that are likely to happen subconsciously either from the Chinese or US's end. Prior to 2017, the Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola (2016) report revealed the likelihood of US-China trade war taking shape in the near future and the potential impact on economy, politics, military, and international relations of the two countries and the globe as a whole.

As evidenced in the previous studies conducted in 2016 and 2017 above, there is a clear indication that some of the authors rightfully predicted the likelihood of there being US-China trade wars. The predictions were important at that time as they laid an objective background on which the future research would be conducted on the bilateral relations between China and the US. Most of the previous studies were accurate in their prediction of

the impending trade wars although they initially questioned Trump's capability to implement his threats of trade wars on China, and the consequences of trade wars between the two economic giants. Furthermore, most of the studies lacked the capabilities to evaluate the main mediating factors at the time of trade wars apart from Lazard (2017) who demonstrated several factors justifying the actions to be taken by the US. Currently, the Trump administration is in power, and the US-China trade war is a reality. However, just like in the previous studies, there is still limited research on the current academic debate on the US-China trade war. The focus should be on the factors promoting the occurrence of the trade war. Various sources, mainly grey literature, which is mainly the media reports, want people to believe that it is all about trade. However, although this might be a genuine hypothesis, there is the need to conduct further research to advance the understanding of the unknown reasons or assumptions behind the trade war. It will make sense if the real reasons behind the trade war are identified and the possible impact of the trade war on the two economies predicted.

The research problem is that there is limited research on the real issues surrounding the China-US trade war especially regarding the involvement of the US in fanning the war. This makes the impasse somehow complex as there is no clear evidence from the current academic research on this particular aspect of the trade war. However, it is understandable there is some evidence pointing towards the trade war and the assumption that the long-standing trade issues between the two countries are the main problems. This research proceeds to evaluate the trade war with the previous assumptions that trade issues are the main triggers of the war but with reservations on the likelihood of there being several other mediating factors. The research proceeds further to evaluate whether the US has other intentions such as containment of China in relation to sustaining the economic, political, and technological supremacy. History indicates that the previous US administrations failed to contain China

through trade wars, and that they were on losing end whenever they imposed trade tariffs on Chinese imports. Hence, it is surprising that the Trump administration is intending to repeat the history even when the success level is likely to be null; therefore, bringing up the question on the intentions of the current trade wars with China. Other motives should be investigated to completely dissect the problem.

There are indications in the research that the US will not allow China to dominate the global economy to curb China's fast ascension to economic dominance. Hence, there is a way of containment that should be directed toward China's rise as the US believes it is a threat to her hegemony. Moreover, there is limited academic research on the role of China in the whole trade war as China is perceived to be the victim while the US is the perpetrator. Efforts have been made by China to apply diplomatic approaches to solve the impasse but the US is not willing to oblige due to the belief that there must be a win-win situation and that there should be no any compromise. Hence, it is important to fill this knowledge gap by examining if supremacy battles are the main triggers of the US-China trade wars to add to the assumption that it is all about trade issues between the two countries. The research will also contribute new knowledge to the options that are available and the counter-measures being undertaken by China in the face-off. Ultimately, by solving this problem, it will be understood why the US is focusing on stun measures and yet China is being sufficiently diplomatic in solving the impasse. The current research responds to questions, and it is expected that the persisting knowledge gaps will be filled through the analysis of the overarching discourse on the US-China trade wars. At the end, it will be known whether there are other underlying issues apart from trade issues that can be said to be fanning the war. Ultimately, dissecting these issues will help to evaluate whether the differences are reconcilable in addition to identifying the worst outcomes in case the two countries fail to escape the Thucydides's Trap.

1.3 Research Questions

For the purposes of addressing the research problem, only two research questions have been developed for answering.

Question 1: *What is the role of economic, technological, and political supremacy in the US-China trade wars?*

This is another key question in this research that is aimed at expounding on the factors creating a tense environment that fans the progression of the China-US trade wars. This question is important because it attempts to explain why the US is insisting to proceed with the coercive techniques against China and yet China has made it clear that everything can be solved diplomatically. There is a part of the research problem that indicates the likelihood of there being other issues apart from the assumption that trade-related issues are the main causes of the trade wars. This question delves deeper into this issue by analysing the likelihood of other factors being the causes of the impasse. As much as trade issues have been widely acknowledged in the past reports as the leading causes of the current impasse, it is appropriate to investigate the impact of economic, technological, and political supremacy on the relations that exist between China and the US. This makes it possible to go beyond the trade aspect to determine if it is being used as an excuse and yet the US is seeking to achieve other agenda. It should also be noted that trade wars are not only about the imposition of trade tariffs but also other factors play various roles. Solving this question will aid the process of developing a better understanding of the real factors fanning the trade wars, which may not only be trade-related. Ultimately, if it is true that other factors are playing intermediary roles in the impasse, then the interventional approaches should be refined and adopted to expeditiously solve the problem for the best interest of the citizens of both countries and the global economy at large. Trade and stronger ties should be put into perspective while addressing this issue but not forgetting personal interests held by the US and China.

Question 2 : *Why is China more concerned with economic cooperation and restoration of diplomatic relations with the US other than taking a protectionist stand like the US in the current trade wars?*

It has been widely evidenced in the literature and media sources that China, even though is on the receiving end of the trade wars that have been designed and launched by the US, is committed to ensuring continuous cooperation with the US. This question is relevant to the research problem because it sets precedence in understanding why China believes that it is appropriate to engage diplomatically instead of taking a protectionist stand like the US. There might be reasons for this action although not covered in the past and current literature.

Having answers to this question enhances the understanding of the Chinese history as regards her sustainability of trade relations with every country that it relates with. There are various reasons that may be historic in addition to other current factors and interests that interplay the current situation. The approach of responding to this question is in three subsections to exhaustively detail the main problem with reference to a wide range of the literature.

The first part of this question responds to the protection of diplomatic relations as proposed by China. This subsection seeks to respond to the situation from a different perspective that is leaned more toward sober negotiations unlike the US whose main course of action has taken the confrontation approach. On its side, China is more concerned with restoring the diplomatic relations that the two countries have been enjoying for the past decades. However, the Trump administration has failed to consider launching diplomatic missions to address the pending issues or else, the US is not attaching too much affection to the past and impending meetings between the US and Chinese government officials. There have been numerous attempts to solve this impasse through diplomatic means in the past but most of them have been futile. Leaders from the US and China have met on several occasions to discuss the issue but all attempts have been fruitless. The reasons for declining to fully participate in the

negotiations and arrive at amicable solutions are still subject to further investigation. Hence, this question presents specific findings on this issue by partially providing historic account of the Chinese culture in relation to the belief that diplomacy is the best approach of solving the impasse.

The second subsection covers economic cooperation that China insists that should be central to the relationship with the US. China has always believed that economic cooperation is the most important issue especially when involved in bilateral trade agreements with other economies. The US has been her historical trade partner, and each of the two countries understands the history concerning involvement in trade practices with each other.

The third subsection under this question is on the issue of protectionism. The US is more concerned with the protection of its internal affairs at the expense of China and the rest of the world. Trump has always promoted the slogans 'Make America Great Again' and 'America First' His initiatives are protectionist in nature as they attempt to focus more on what is important to the US while ignoring the overall impact on the rest of the world. According to reports, the US is aiming at a situation where her citizens can only consume the locally produced products and services. However, it is appalling because the same US is contradicting the China's 'Made in China' initiative. Here, there are double standards at play that should be examined closely to explain why the US is advocating for something while contradicting it by doing the same at home. In this case, it has been noted that each of the two economies has personal interests that they want to achieve for their own people. Therefore, this leads to an examination of why the US is more concerned with coercing China to drop its agenda of Made in China and what is believed to be a protectionist move when viewed from the perspective of the US. This subsection enhances the understanding of whether the China-US trade war is mainly related to the protectionist approach being applied by the US, and

why China is unwilling to apply the same approach to counter the US but insists on economic cooperation.

1.4 Methodology

A qualitative constructionist approach was used in this research. A qualitative research is the type of study that aims to apply inductive theorisation to develop a theory from the collected data (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018; Creswell, 2014). According to Faggiolani (2011), this is a form of grounded theory that enables the researcher to develop theory from the existing data through inductive approaches. This implies that theory is developed from the collected data while also basing the analysis on the research problem and the research questions developed by the researcher. This approach is advantageous because it makes it possible for the researcher to come up with a theory that is then used to interpret a phenomenon (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 8). This also leads to confirmation or refuting the assumptions that have already been made prior to the study process. For instance, this research attempts to investigate the issue of trade wars between China and the US and whether other factors other than trade-related issues are also fanning the impasse but the US is unwilling to confirm that there are other factors. Here, the theory that is of great interest relates to the other factors that are believed to be responsible for the impasse. Another aspect of the theory is that trade-related issues are being used as excuses and yet there are deep-grounded issues that influence the trade wars. Hence, investigating these issues through the grounded theory approach will add relevance to the whole research process. This theory might be proven in the future through further research or when the current assumptions are confirmed by the turn of events.

A qualitative secondary research was applied in this study due to the inability to collect primary data in its entirety. Hence, secondary data from published articles and other internet sources (partly grey literature) were considered for analysis. Most of the data was obtained from the Ebscohost database mainly using the search terms 'US- China trade wars,' 'US-

China relations,’ ‘factors for US-China trade wars’, ‘economic cooperation between China and the US’, ‘protectionism in the US-China relations’, ‘history of China diplomacy’, ‘US China political supremacy’, ‘US China economic supremacy,’ and ‘technological advances in China’ Several studies were returned but only a few that indicated relevance to the research topic were considered for inclusion. The most recent literature published in the past few years was preferred because the debate on US-China trade war is current; thus, older research would not be important in providing the latest perspective of the issue. However, some old articles have been included in the results section for purposes of providing historic context of the issues under investigations. Referring to historical events is necessary for evaluating whether the assumptions or findings have been consistent or whether they have been changes from then to now. For instance, it is necessary to understand the history of China-US trade relations and the Chinese culture of applying diplomacy in solving international disputes to impose meaning on the current happenings. This can only be achieved by revisiting the past studies that have followed the trend of events pertaining to the relations between the two countries.

The research is mainly theoretical because it depends on textual findings from the previous studies. Secondary data is appropriate as it is easier to critique from different perspectives with the intention of developing a theory from the perspective of inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2014). It was noted that there is limited research on this particular topic but there exists several studies that are helpful. Moreover, most of the studies on this particular topic are not conclusive in their findings as the trade war is still on course; thus, assumptions on the end results of the war have been presented in the literature. This means that conclusions cannot be made from the previous studies, and the focus should only be on the current and future research on the topic. This is one of the fundamental methodological limitations faced in conducting the research. Another methodological limitation faced in the study is the use of

grey literature to corroborate the findings from the academic literature. For instance, reports from the media have been used to set up the debate; thus, raising the question of credibility of the findings. Though not highly reliable, there were very few alternatives of accessing the most recent information on the continuing US-China trade war and the looming war of aggression. Thus, this is the justification of including this type of evidence in the research.

The research process is less complicated. It was mainly about responding to the two research questions in a systematic manner through critiquing the current evidence and comparing it to other sources that depict the trends in the current events and the assumptions on what may happen in the future regarding the topic of interest. The first question was addressed systematically by identifying the potential literature on the topic of the US-China trade wars and what China thinks about the war. The three subsections of the main question have been addressed to explain trade cooperation, diplomacy, and protectionism as the main themes arising from the question. They have been explained, ideas critiqued, and then juxtaposed with the current evidence. This was the best approach of evaluating and discussing the question to address the fundamental issues within the research problem. There is also the second question that has been solved in the same manner. This question is on the role of economic, technological, and political supremacy in the US-China trade wars. To respond to the question, the literature was searched to determine the possible factors related to the three aspects that might have contributed to the initiation and progression of the trade wars between China and the US. In a similar design, evidence was synthesised thematically on the individual issues to come up with convergent views demonstrating that trade-related issues might not be the only triggers of the tainted diplomatic relations between China and the US. Just like the first question, both academic and non-academic literature sources were considered for synthesis. The non-academic literature was obtained from news sources, and

was mainly used to corroborate the academic literature while providing the latest context on the on-going China-US trade wars.

1.5 Research Summary

The research acknowledges that there are trade wars between China and the US that have been instigated by the US against China. The Trump administration is aiming to impose trade tariffs on Chinese imports as an offensive against China's trade actions that are deemed detrimental to the US' economic interests. However, this seems not to be the real problem in the current trade wars as the same situations have failed in the past leading to visible damage to the US economy. In the recent time, both President Bush and President Obama imposed trade tariffs on Chinese imports as an anti-dumping initiative but the decisions did not achieve the intended outcomes. This is an act of protectionism by the US government and yet it is accusing China of the same. This also means that protectionism is playing a big role but China is committed to continue cooperating with the US as it has been from the past even though the bilateral relations have been shaky all along. Given that the past protectionist approaches by the US have never worked against China, it implies that even Trump would fail in his latest offensive against China. This also makes it justifiable to question the intention of the US, and it has been confirmed through thematic analysis of secondary data that it is beyond trade issues. It has been concluded that the US is using the trade wars as a conduit of containing China's rise in economic, political, and technological spheres. The US believes that the fast pace with which China is rising will shake the global geopolitics and the status quo, thus, China should be contained with immediate effect. On its end, China seems to be weary of the Thucydides's Trap thesis, and it does not want to be trapped alongside the US, which will lead to military confrontation. This is the reason why, despite all the pressures mounted on China by the US, China is noncommittal and its main interest is to put the impasse to rest through diplomatic approaches.

CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents results and discusses the two questions identified for the purpose of examining the research problem. The two questions have been discussed thematically with subtopics identified under each. This is the most important chapter in this research, and it is expected to put to an end the much hyped issues between China and the US. To some extent, the elements of the two research questions are related, which makes the analysis process stronger.

2.0 Question 1: What is the role of economic, technological, and political supremacy in the US-China trade wars?

Responding to this question corroborates the finding of the other question. Responding to this question will complete the dissection of the China-US trade wars. It has been previously assumed that the trade wars have been fanned with trade-related issues; however, the trends indicate that there are other factors other than trade issues fuelling the diplomatic stand-off between the two countries. The factors discussed in this section are economic, technological, and political supremacy. It will be established whether these factors are partly responsible for the trade-wars.

2.1.1 Economic Supremacy

Economic Supremacy is one of the central factors in the raging trade war between China and the US. Each of the two economic superpowers is angling to assert its economic authority around the world. First, the US would like to preserve the global economic order where it remains as the largest economy in the world (Li, He & Lin, 2018). According to the World Bank (2018), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the US by the year 2017 was \$19.391 trillion while that of China was \$12.24 trillion. Expressed in terms of GDP per Capita, the US attains 59,531.66 while China hits 8,826.99 (World Bank, 2018). Even though such

figures indicate that the US is still at the helm, as its economic output as well as the spread of its wealth in the population is still superior to China, growth analyses indicate that China is on the rise. By 2001, China's GDP was a paltry 1.339 trillion dollars while that of the US was 10.62 trillion dollars, an implication that America's total wealth was about 12.6 % of that of the US (World Bank, 2017). However, when compared to the figures of 2017, China had experienced higher growth to command about 63 % of the American economy.

Comparatively, between 2001 and 2017, China and the US experienced GDP growths of 814 % and 82% respectively, a clear indication that while the American economy had not doubled, that of China had grown by eight folds. Among the biggest contributors to the rapid economic growth are the economic reforms that China underwent after the end of Mao Zedong's regime. Prior, China had adopted a total protectionist policy where it had cordoned off its economy from the rest of the world. However, bigger reforms were realized at the dawn of the new millennium when China officially joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), a development that compelled the nation to embrace international trade (Agarwal & Wu, 2004). One of the key benefits of China joining the trade body was that it opened up its economy and made it more competitive as noted by Agarwal and Wu (2004) who stated that "After 15 years of negotiations, China finally joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001. Because of trade and investment liberalization under the WTO, there will be greater competition between Chinese and foreign firms, both inside China and outside China" (p. 279). Therefore, as a result, China began not just to tap into foreign markets; it also started to attract foreign investments. For instance, between 2000 and 2013, China experienced a rapid increase in its foreign direct investment, FDI from \$ 6.6 billion to \$ 105.2, a clear indicator of the increasing investor confidence in the country (CEIC, 2018). As China continues to grow the US economic policymakers are increasingly concerned that the country could be overthrown as the ultimate

economic power. Thus, China's economic growth has alarmed US leaders about the need to contain the Chinese growth.

The 2016 the US election signalled higher concerns about the Chinese threat to its stronghold on the global economic order. The onset of the current trade antagonism can be traced to the campaign period where both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton who were the lead contenders admitted that China's rapid rise was a major concern (Davis, 2018). The fact that Trump who had threatened to impose sanctions on China to correct the trade imbalance between the two nations was given a nod by the voters indicates that the US population also felt that the economic influence of China had to be contained.

One of the indicators to the trade imbalance between the US and China revolves around the issues of jobs, tariffs and the balance of payments (Soofi, 2009). Firstly, the US feels that China's economic growth is at the disadvantage of the United States, as numerous American companies such as Nike and Apple have transferred their manufacturing to China. One of the reasons why many companies have pitched tent in China is due to the affordable labour in the country as noted by Bieler and Lee (2017) who stated that, 'as most export production is based on cheap labor, China must ensure a continuing supply of workers willing to work for low wages' (p. 184). Consequentially, many of the American jobs have moved abroad and the supremacy battle heats up especially due to the unemployment concerns before the onset of the trade war in 2017. For instance, according to Statista (2018c), between 2012 and 2017, the US unemployment rates have been juggling between 8.1 % and 4.4 % while that of China lay between 4.09 % and 3.9 %, a clear indication that the labor participation and job output in China have been better than that of the US, a situation that has made the trade war to be about who can put up better numbers.

Another key point of contention is the imbalance of trade between the US of China that makes the recent trade animosity between the two countries more about ensuring that each

asserts its economic authority over each other. According to the American Census Bureau (2018), the trade deficit between the US and China has increased from -273,041.6 in 2010 to -419,162.0 in 2017, raising concerns that China was taking advantage of the US. One of the biggest indicators that it's a supremacy battle is because the current American leadership has vowed to stem China's industrial power and reposition the US as the preferred destination for foreign investment. Aptly put, the United States would like to loosen China's firm grip on the international manufacturing and processing matrix. According to Huer (2017), the US would like to derail the Chinese take over by revamping American manufacturing as evident by the "Made in USA" rallying call that is aimed to ensure that the American economic authority and superiority in the world is restored. Thus, for the US leaders such as Donald Trump, the economic take on China is all about ensuring that the US remains as the ultimate destination of investment and economic growth. Such a position indicates that the United States is interested in clipping the economic wings of China. This helps to answer the research problem as it stretches beyond the assumption that the war is mainly about trade related issues between the two countries.

Among the biggest indicators of the economic supremacy are the tariffs as well as the use of foreign currency between the two nations, with each nation striving to outdo the other one. According to the BBC (2018), currently the United States has imposed tariffs on Chinese goods worth \$ 253 billion while China has retaliated with \$ 110 billion tariffs, but the major signal to the economic show of might is due to the fact that the US has vowed to slap China with an additional \$ 267 billion with China promising to raise its tariffs. Thus, synonymous with some of the global supremacy battles such as the arms race, the trade war has risen as an avenue for the two countries to show their might as each strives to show that it is the epicenter of global economic activity (Li, He & Hin, 2018). The US has long accused China of engaging in currency malpractices such as the devaluing of its currency that gives the

nation undue advantage in international trade. Thus, the battle has heated up with each of the two powers striving to position their currencies as the best alternatives in international trade. Traditionally, the US dollar has been the standard denomination in international trade, a situation that China and its key allies such as Russia intend to stem as they aim to reduce their dependence on the American economy. According to Malle (2017), China is moving ahead to underline her economic independence and superiority by entering into alliances with countries such as Russia, a move that will not just cushion its economy from any sanctions by the US but also send a strong global message that China has come of age and partners in regions such as Africa and Asia can look up to China for economic guidance and protection. Thus, such developments indicate that while the US is flexing its economic muscles by imposing more tariffs, China is instituting measures that will ensure that it gains economic autonomy that will safeguard its economic superiority in the foreseeable future.

While the US aspires to preserve its economic power, it also shows its supremacy through international trade bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) that it has pressurized to make China open up its economy to foreign competition. According to Howse (2016), the US is the biggest financier to the global trade regulation body. Thus, by threatening to exit the World Trade Organization (WTO), the US would like not just to shake up the global economic order but also demonstrate why it still has the powers to neutralize the growing Chinese influence around the globe. If the US exits the WTO, the body will be dented both financially and in terms of membership as other nations might follow suit; hence, leaving the international trade under the unilateral control of established players like itself and China. Thus, through the World Trade Organization, the US aspires to use its power to compel China to open up its markets to other countries. Precisely, the US claims that WTO favors China as it still rates it as a developing nation despite the fact that it has experienced tremendous economic growth over the years. Liu and Woo (2018) take note of such a

situation by stating that, ‘our principal policy suggestion to China is that, because China’s economy in 2018 is very different from that in 1978 (e.g. many parts of China now look like Singapore and China is Africa’s biggest donor), there should be more reciprocity in China’s trade and investment relations with the advanced economies despite China’s status as a developing economy under WTO rules’ (p. 280). Contextually, the US wants China to liberalize its markets more besides being granted an elevated status as a developed country by the WTO. Thus, the threats by the US to cripple the operations of such bodies is not just about trade but also a move that is aimed at sending a strong message to other nations in emerging markets in Europe and Asia that it is still the custodian of the global economic order.

2.1.2 Political Supremacy

This section tends to dissect the trade war by evaluating whether political supremacy is a factor promoting the US-China trade war. To a greater extent, the trade war between the US and China is also dictated by political supremacy battles (Li, He & Hin, 2018). Since the Second World War, the United States has enjoyed the status of being the global political power owing to its military might and influence on global policies (Brands, 2017). According to Statista (2018a), China has seen its military expenditure increase from \$ 49.88 billion in 2001 to about 228.17 billion in 2017 while that of the United States has grown from \$301.9 billion to \$609.76 billion for the same period. Thus, the Chinese defense spending has increased by about 357.43 % while that of the United States has grown by 101.97 %, a clear indicator that China is pumping more resources into its military preparedness than the US. Consequentially, in the age of Donald Trump and the rise of populism, there is a feeling that the American political influence around the globe is waning as shown by Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Therefore, the US aspires to use the trade war as an avenue of stemming the growing Chinese influence around the world as China’s economic might funds its military

expeditions, research, and development. Moreover, it is also important to note that there is a correlation between the proceeds of trade and how they are used to expand and fund the activities of the Chinese army as elaborated by the fact that the enrolled servicemen of the US by 2018 were about 1,281,900 while that of China were 2, 693, 000 (World Bank, 2018a). Thus, by winning the trade war, the US aspires to reduce the economic production and growth of China, an effect that will eventually eat into its military budget and slowing aspects such as innovation, recruitment, and training. The efficacy of such a strategy is already evident when the Chinese parliament's budget committee announced in 2016 that for the first time in 10 years, the growth of military spending will not be in double but single digits that will range from 7-8 %, a trajectory that has since continued as the government embarks on tight public spending to curb on the economic shock triggered by the trade war (Ide, 2016). Likewise, given that China has been moving to forge strategic military alliances with the US' political adversary; Russia, the trade war will be an avenue to derail such efforts. Korolev (2018) highlights the increasing military ties between China and Russia by stating that, 'China and Russia have created strong institutional foundations for an alliance, and now only minor steps are necessary for a formal and functioning military alliance to materialize' (p.1). Thus, by embracing Russia, China is putting the American political interests around the world at risk. It is worth noting that the US has fought historical political battles with China and Russia as far as the global political order is concerned. Since the height of the cold war, Russia and China have leaned towards communist and socialist orders while the United States and other western powers have promoted capitalism (Callaghan, 2001). Thus, the US views China as a threat to the capitalism and democracy especially after China joined Russia in endorsing the socialist government of Nicholas Maduro in Venezuela, a clear indicator that the two Eastern powers are keen on engaging in a political battle with the US (Labrador, 2019). Such support echoes the support that Russia and China granted Bashir Al-Asaad in

Syria despite western outcries that the Syrian regime was perpetrating crimes against humanity on its population by using chemical weapons (Labrador, 2019). Therefore, such defiance of the American positions by the Russia and China raises concerns about the strength of political power of the US around the world. This also implies that the trade war will offer the US an avenue to starve China of the funding it needs to grow its military.

International cooperation is also another political bone of contention that has sparked the trade war between China and the US. Firstly, there is the issue of Taiwan, that is a political adversary of the government of mainland China and previously the US had committed not to recognize Taiwan as a country as part of the agreement in initiating formal relations with China (Chien, 2015). However, in 2018, the American Congress enacted a law that will further American-Taiwanese relations, a clear violation of the “One China” Policy that has been a key pillar of diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries (Chen, 2015). Most importantly, the US President had initiated formal and direct communication with Taiwan; a position that Huang (2018) reckons will be against China’s interests by stating that, ‘From China’s perspective, President Trump’s assurance that the US would not play the Taiwan card removed the most contentious of concerns from the agenda’ (p. 30). Therefore, the US would like to use the trade war as an avenue to reach out to Taiwan and giving it an economic and political lifeline as retaliation against China’s continuous dalliance with Russia. On the other hand, China is ready to safeguard its political pride especially its long-standing ambitions of annexing back Taiwan to mainland China in a move resembling what Russia did to Ukraine’s Crimea. Another boiling point of global geopolitics is the African continent that has increasingly embraced Chinese ideologies (Lau, 2018). Traditionally, the US and her western allies such as the UK have been Africa’s unrivalled political partners as envisaged in the defence agreement and joint efforts in containing threats such as terrorism. However, the balance has tilted towards China as many African countries receive massive

loans and aid from China (Naruzzaman, 2016). Over the years, China has been closing in to rival the US in terms of aid channelled to Africa as shown by the argument that by 2012, the two countries pledged \$75 and \$90 billion, respectively, towards Africa (Amusa, Monkam & Vieg, 2016). Of greater importance is the fact that the China's support for socio-economic programs in Africa has not only grown but it has also embarked on a different economic policy that entails writing off the debts of African countries. Such aid combined with the increased Chinese investment in African through mega projects signifies the growing influence of China in the region. According to the World Bank (2018), China commands an overwhelming 20 % of the foreign debt owed by African countries. Through the debts, China has not just managed to woo Africa to its political plans such as the One Road initiative but also the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Naidu (2007) argued that through FOCAC, China has been able to stamp its political and social influence in Africa as shown by the fact that there are needs to integrate Chinese curriculum in some African countries. According to the Military Balance (2019), African countries now acquire 66.66 % of its warfare equipment from China, a development that could shift their military and defence allegiance to China and the US is keen to contain such a development. Even though Africa does not have immense economic power when compared with the Americas and Euro-Asia, it is a strategic place for mineral exploitation that is key for manufacturing technologies for devices like mobile phones and computers. The US is concerned that if untamed, China's influence could hamper its military cooperation with Africa and thus the trade war will be an avenue to neutralize China's economic power that is being used to woo African countries to embrace the East. Therefore, just in the mould of the colonial scramble for Africa, the US and China are fighting to see who asserts the biggest influence in Africa as stated by Moyo (2016) who states that , 'A variant of this perspective views China as a "sub-imperial" force leading the Scramble for African resources only as a tributary component of Euro-American

hegemony' (p. 61). The trade war will be an indirect avenue of settling such a squabble as economic resources and power will dictate who between China and the US will tap Africa to be its socio-political partner. Thus, behind the trade war, there is a battle to control Africa by China and the US, a clear indicator that international cooperation is at stake as shown by the renewed scramble for Africa.

The control and activities at the South China Sea are other political considerations that are shaping the trade war (Lukin, 2019). First and foremost, the South China Sea is a beehive of economic activities as shown by the fact that more than \$3 trillion of global goods pass through it besides its richness in oil reserves (Morton, 2016). Moreover, the sea controls 40 % of the world's trade that is executed over the seas (Morton, 2016). China has embarked on a plan that will stamp its presence in the South China seas as stated by Morton (2016) that, 'a dominant narrative of Chinese expansionism now prevails that assumes the Chinese leadership is predominantly concerned with achieving hegemony in the South China Sea at any cost' 912). In recent years, China has moved to stamp its authority in the area by conducting more military drills and positioning more warships as it views the sea as key to its desires to control the global trade as well as protecting its boundaries. Therefore, China contents that it has the legitimate control over the entire sea while the US fights for the sea to be open for the purposes of maritime freedom that will prevent China's control over the world's biggest sea trade route (Kim, 2015). The control over South China Sea is of significant political interest to the US due to the fact that it pits China against American allies such as the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Thus, through the trade war, the US intends to loosen China's grip on the sea. It is also important to note that the South China Sea is important for global power as a considerable chunk of military equipment transit through it, raising security stakes as evidenced by the argument that it is now the sea corridor with highest levels of piracy (Morton, 2016). If the US does not contain China's ambitious plan to

control the sea, then it will be giving its political enemy control over the world's trade, a situation that will further strengthen the global influence of China. The stakes over the South China Sea have increased especially after the US continued to arm China's adversaries as shown by the recent \$0.33 and \$ 1.3 billion arms deal between the American and Taiwanese governments (Kucik, 2018). Therefore, the United States is using the trade war as an avenue to rebuke China for its activities in the South China Sea, in a supremacy battle that is aimed to neutralizing the economic and political influence of China around the world.

2.1.3 Technological Supremacy

At the center of the trade war with China is a major technological battle. The rise of China as a major technological power is underlined by the surge in its industrial power. In technologies such as computer and mobile manufacturing, Chinese companies such as Huawei give American companies like Apple stiff competition, especially in emerging markets. The issue of Intellectual Property (IP) rights in China has gained more prominence in recent years especially due to the increasing importance of technology and innovation in driving socio-economic and political agenda. One of the reasons why the violation of IP rights is rampant in China is due to the fact that there is reluctance among government officials to enforce the existing laws. Such a position is captured by Mercurio (2012) who stated that, 'China would fail to enforce its IPR laws and commitments was foreshadowed almost immediately after the agreement when a senior USTR official visiting Guangdong was told by a senior provincial government leader that, "Beijing's agreement" with the US was "mei you guanxi" (irrelevant) in that southern province' (p. 26). A classic example can be shown by the 2018 case where the Chinese government coordinated hackings into the computer systems of the American department of defence and stole about 614 gigabytes of facts, figures, and information about the American navy's operations and warfare equipment development (Nakashima & Sonne, 2018). It is vital to note that the theft of defence secrets

in aspects such as missile development give China undue advantage as it accesses research and development information that it has not invested any effort or financial resources in acquiring. Thus, the Chinese government has played a significant role in the fanning of the dispute especially due to the fact that it directs individuals to violate IP rights on its behalf. Consequentially, through the trade war, the US aims at pressurizing China to adopt a level playing field for American and Chinese companies.

One of the key issues in the US-China trade war is trade secrets. The US has accused China of deploying hackers and spies to acquire information about business strategy and product development and use them to their advantage. USTR (2017) takes note of the rampant violation of trade secrets in China by stating that, ‘most troubling are reports that actors affiliated with the Chinese government and the Chinese military have infiltrated the computer systems of U.S. companies, stealing terabytes of data, including the companies’ intellectual property (IP), for the purpose of providing commercial advantages to Chinese enterprises’ (p. 9). Therefore, the product development and business plans of American companies such as Nike and Apple have increasingly become vulnerable to being stolen by China especially because they produce a considerably big chunk of their products in China. According to the USTR (2018), the US loses between \$260 and \$600 billion due to the infringement of its trade secrets by China. The loss of American trade secrets to Chinese companies has a long-standing history as shown by the 1992 case where Microsoft lost trade secrets worth \$30 million to Chinese hackers to latest incidences such as the 2010 case where Gipson Hoffman & Pancione company accused the Chinese government of coordinating and executing cyber-attacks on its systems with the motivation of stealing its trade secrets (Carr & Gorman, 2001). According to Li and Lin, (2018), trade secrets have a central role in the US-China trade war as technology is the next biggest frontier for political and economic control. The rise of financial technology (Fintech), big data, and Artificial intelligence underlines the vitality of

technology in the economies and civilizations of the future. One of the clearest pointers to the fact that trade secrets play a quintessential role is because the US government attributed the \$50 billion of the tariffs imposed on China to its continuous infringement of trade secrets (Pham, 2018). Thus, by enforcing trade secrets, the United States aims to protect its innovators and maintain its position as the world's leader in innovation and imagination.

Patents and copyright are other frontiers of IP rights that have put the US and China at loggerheads. The USTR (2016) highlights the laxity of the Chinese government to enforce copyright laws by stating that, 'similarly, although rights holders report increased enforcement efforts by Chinese government authorities, counterfeiting in China, affecting a wide range of goods, remains widespread'. One of the reasons for the rampant causes of copyright infringing is because the requirements for registering trademarks at times involve the Chinese government compelling interested companies such as software developers to disclose their product development methodologies such as codes hence making such organizations to shy off from exposing themselves to such bureaucratic vetting methods. According to China IPR (2018), the number of copyright, trademark and patent cases in China has surged from 31.43 % in 2016 to 35.50 % in 2017. According to Thiebaut (2018), China violates IP rights as it engages in the production of counterfeit and substandard goods that imitate authentic models of American products and registering brands that have names similar to the American ones. The major concern is due to the fact that China does not just profiteer from the innovation of American companies but also takes the pride of being a centre of innovation. Therefore, through the enforcement of patents, trademarks and copyright, the US seeks to cement its position as the global leader in innovation.

Last but not least, it is important to acknowledge that the internet has revolutionized the socio-economic and political order of the world. Therefore, the trade war also has undertones about the online supremacy battle between China and the United States about issues such as

technology transfer and cyber security. USTR (2017) highlights China's role in the violation of online IP rights by stating that, 'online piracy in China is widespread and continues on a large scale, affecting industries distributing legitimate music, motion pictures, books and journals, software and video games.' The internet presents a major point of the US economic growth due to the fact that e-commerce has grown immensely as shown by the fact that that companies such as Amazon have seen their revenues increase from \$14.84 billion in 2007 to a whopping \$232.89 billion in 2018 (Statista, 2018b). Therefore, through the trade war, the United States aims to deter China from ambushing its companies that rely on the world wide web and other related technologies such as cloud computing. Liu (2018) take note of the role of technology transfer in the trade war by stating that China is taking advantage of its market partners by using its market power to benefit itself. This means that the technological supremacy being portrayed by China is contributing to its abuse of IP rights. Another conclusion made by Liu (2018) is that this intimidation by China is likely to go on until the world's biggest economies unite to fight against the vice. China has embarked on the forceful transfer of technology through illegal acts such as piracy in industries like film and game making. It is important to note that the role of the internet in the US socio-political orientation is due to the increased role that sites such as social media play in the contemporary American life as shown by facets such as the rise of fake news and cyber-related crimes sponsored by Eastern players like China and Russia as shown by the 2016 presidential election. The US recognizes the importance of cyber security in its security and economic growth due to the fact that global systems are becoming interconnected and computer-cantered platforms such as the internet are becoming platforms for information sharing, socialization, and commerce all over the world. Therefore, by rebuking China over technology transfer violations, the US is flexing its technological muscles as it seeks to prove to the world that it is prepared to contain any attack on its technological infrastructure and

can take punitive measures against countries and state-sponsored actors. Due to the rapidly growing population of China, the US acknowledges that a direct confrontation can have major global political consequences and thus the trade war is an avenue being used to fight wars such as the forceful transfer of technology by the Chinese government.

2.2 Question 1 : Why is China more concerned with economic cooperation and restoration of diplomatic relations with the US other than taking a protectionist stand like the US in the current trade wars?

This research question attempts to solve several issues that have remained mysterious for long in the US-China relationships. The current impasse created by trade war between China and the US seems not to end soon even though each side is working on its own mechanisms to help in restoring normalcy. There is the need to pursue this question from an objective perspective for the interest of determining the role of the US in the trade war and what China thinks should be its role in mitigating further crisis. It also positions China as party that is interested in resolving the problem amicably while also evaluating whether the US is sincere in the negotiation process or whether there are other unknown interests being pursued. The question brings forth the concepts of diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and protectionism in international relations. These sections have been discussed objectively in relation to the current trade wars and the history of the two countries in matters bilateral trade and economic competition. Historical background on the concepts has also been established to give them appropriate contexts to answer the question concisely.

2.2.1 Diplomatic Relations

The Cambridge Dictionary defines diplomatic relations as ‘the arrangement between two countries by which each has representatives in the other country’ (Cambridge University

Press, 2019). These relations allow the countries to interact and communicate with each other. The US and China has been in diplomatic relations for long but the current trade wars are likely to taint the relations. This section details the nature of diplomatic relations between the US and China over these years, and the intention of China in ensuring positive diplomatic relations with the US. It also questions the perceptions of the US toward its relations with China and whether it is concerned with tainting the positive relations that has been developed over many years. Most importantly, it is essential to investigate why China is more interested in maintaining diplomatic relations instead of retaliating against the US' aggression.

There is relevance in delving deeper into the nature of diplomatic relations between China and the US. The history of the diplomatic relations between China and the US dates back to a time when the US gained independence. The nature of the diplomatic relations between the two countries has been positive for long, strong, and complex even though the US has been more interested in protecting hegemony (De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018). As earlier mentioned, the two countries have had strong economic relationships over these years, which are destined for greatness currently and in the future. This relationship has also led to constructive political relations between the US and China. However, even though there are strong diplomatic ties between the two countries, there have been unending hegemonic rivalry and suspicion over each other's intentions. Loftus, (2019) argues that China and the US do not trust each other, and it is important to make this assumption for the purpose of advancing the debate on trade wars. De Graaff and Van Apeldoorn (2018) add to this argument by stating that China has been envisaged to overthrow the rules-based liberal world order set by the US. Hence, the determining factor will be whether the US will relentlessly prevent China from interfering with the liberal world order. This argument has also been vividly explained by Woon (2018) in addressing the geopolitics impacting the relationship between the two countries. According to this author, each of the two countries is weary of the

other due to the belief that they are potential adversaries to each other (Woon, 2018). This issue had been previously discussed in Mearsheimer (2010) that the post-Cold War US has been weary of China, and that there has been the belief that a powerful China is a threat to the national security. The arguments by Mearsheimer (2010) regarding the intentions of the US are essential as they set precedence for the current debate on the same issue. The history has been longstanding, which means that the US has been consistent in ensuring that China does not rise above the thresholds. Note that these thresholds have been set by the US, and that they are for the best interest of the US. To add to this, Lee, Wainwright and Glassman (2018) confirmed the presence of hegemonic competition between China and the US. The authors of this study believe that geopolitics play a significant role in fanning the rivalry. It is important that the study brings into perspective the contribution of Marxist and political geography to explain the relationship between geopolitics and economy. The theory of geopolitical economy is essential in this regard, and it can be used to ascertain geoeconomic power relations between the two countries together with the associated outcomes.

In line with the diplomatic relations between China and the US, many scholars, politicians, and pundits have attempted to evaluate whether China and the US will finally clash. To explain this scenario, it is important to consider Graham Allison's *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* In his work, Allison applied the Thucydides' Trap thesis to help determine whether Washington and Beijing will eventually engage in combative war. According to this thesis, in the event where Sparta provokes a conflict with Athens, a conflagration is more likely to be evoked as a result of the security dilemma that will occur (Allison, 2018). In the current situation, Sparta is China while Athens is the US. This is a problem in Thucydides's Trap where war arises when a rising power aims to replace an already established ruling power. In the Thucydides's Trap Project by Allison, it was found that 12 out of 16 cases studied ran into war. The bug number of countries that were

caught up in the Thucydides's Trap and failed to escape is an indication that there are higher chances that the US and China are approaching the brink of war. This means that escaping the Thucydides's Trap is the same as escaping war but it might be unlikely in the China-US situation if the objectivity of the cases in the Thucydides's Trap is to be considered. In relation to this thesis, Loftus (2019) adds that, as China ascends even more as a rising power - militarily, diplomatically, and economically - it will threaten the status quo, which is unimaginable from the perspective of the US. Whether war will arise between China and the US, as analysed by this thesis, is a scenario in waiting since only assumptions can be made to drive the academic debate. China is considerate of the situation and it does not anticipate for a scenario where, with the US, they will fail to escape the Trap. Hence, this might be the reason why China is considering maintaining positive diplomatic relations with the US instead of applying approaches that will further worsen the tension. However, on their side, the US seems not to be bothered by the consequences of the Thucydides's Trap in which it has found herself in together with China. For this reason, China believes that only diplomatic negotiations will rescue her to avoid the looming military confrontations.

It would be necessary for China and the US to maintain positive diplomatic relations as they are historical trade partners. According to an article by Kucik (2018) in *The Conversation*, Presidents Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have resorted to cease the unending tensions that have been fanned by the current trade wars between the two countries. However, there are challenges in arriving at a definitive deal due to the different perceptions held by each of the two parties. The two governments have different depictions of the deal as the Trump administration is for a 90-day moratorium on the increasing tariffs while China concedes to buy significant amounts of goods from the US (Ting, 2018). However, in a turn of events, China places more emphasis on diplomacy and agreement to solve the problem. President Xi Jinping tends to adhere to the foreign policy approaches initially applied by his

predecessors. In the 1990s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the ‘opening up’ economic reforms were introduced to enhance China’s economic growth globally (De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018). Resultantly, ‘keeping low profile’ was the policy that the country adopted at that time. The policy was about China keeping a low profile and avoiding taking international responsibilities so that she can develop quietly (Xuetong, 2014). This is what led to the confirmation to the US by China that China was not intending to undertake leadership in search for hegemony. However, Xi Jinping seems to have taken a different direction by entrenching active political influence for the best interests of the Chinese people (De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018). According to Loftus (2019), President Xi Jinping XI has imminently revolutionised China’s diplomatic disposition through national rejuvenation with the main intention being to promote the ‘Chinese Dream.’ However, Xi is keen to prevent a scenario where China is seen as an ascending power that will threaten the status quo. As a result, there is much concentration on brightening its future on the diplomatic front. Therefore, this explains why China has always been proactive in issues of diplomacy when dealing with her long-term antagonist – the US.

In conclusion, even though China is attempting to keep a low profile and engage the US diplomatically, it seems that the US is not committed to take an active role in this noble course, which makes China to doubt the intentions of the US in this scenario. To some extent, China believes that the trade war might not entirely be about trade issues but other factors might be contributing to the problem. To further illustrate this issue, Lee, Wainwright and Glassman (2018) focused on territorialisation and examined the hegemonic competition between China and the US as pertains to geo-economic strategies and regional competition. This can be explained to mean that China and the US have geopolitical interests that none of them is willing to publicize, and that if the current trade war is not about trade issues, then geopolitics is at play. It also means that if the impasse is about diplomatic relations, it should

then be solved through diplomatic means. The intention by China to solve the impasse diplomatically, related to the history on how the Chinese leaders have been solving diplomatic cases by keeping low profile, means that China has good intentions. Hence, President Xi Jinping wants to remain a diplomat and apply measures that will bring forth a positive outcome. China has no history of confronting her rivals, and that she is worried more about failure to escape from the Thucydides's Trap – which means war with the US. Moreover, China has noticed that settling the rivalry expeditiously will mitigate the negative outcomes that are likely to arise.

2.2.2 Economic Cooperation

Economic cooperation is a concept that has been covered widely in the literature for a long time. Explaining this concept requires one to revisit a bit of the history surrounding the issues. Uncovering the history of economic cooperation between international regions will develop an appropriate background on which further debate can be established. Currently, the world is globalised, and this means that there are various changes in the structure of economic powers through cross-border integration. From the past, economic integration has been taking place in different parts of the world with the key players clearly identified. Some of the regions will be considered for the benefit of this research.

According to Drzymała (2019), the strategic regions for economic integration include Europe under the leadership of the European Union and the Asian region under the leadership of China. In this case, the EU has strengthened its relationship with the Asian region, which has benefited both parties in terms of economic and social integration. The implication is that Europe has continuously strengthened its relationship with the East Asian countries with the intention of benefiting from such economic ties (Drzymała, 2019). Through the Europe-Asia cooperation, the countries were expected to cooperate in different fronts including economic, cultural, political, and intellectual spheres (Drzymała, 2019). The main intention of the

economic cooperation was to open borders and allow free trade among the member states. This an essential background for explaining the need for economic cooperation either bilaterally or multilaterally. However, the willingness of expanding economic cooperation was demonstrated by the European even though there was the intention to enhance bilateral cooperation between individual countries. To some extent, the individual members were also encouraged to trade bilaterally with their counterparts among which are Japan and China. This particular finding indicates that China has always been active in fostering economic cooperation either in bilateral approaches or through regional integration. It is a culture that China has maintained for some time, and there is no evidence indicating a situation whereby China has failed to respond to calls for economic cooperation whether within the Asia-Pacific region or internationally. This is an essential lens from which the relationship between China and the US can be viewed by focusing on the trends of China in the history of economic cooperation while referring to the past relationships between China and the other countries in the world.

China has had a great economic history regarding its bilateral trade with the US. Evidence also indicates that the US established a similar relationship with the Asian countries several years ago under APEC (Drzymała, 2019). A classical economist David Ricardo once asserted that comparative advantage always occurs as pertains trade relations between two countries. This aspect is usually considered in instances whereby national economies are considered as key factors in such relations. Trade relations between China and US have been in existence for long, and China would like to retain the status quo. Recent evidence by Kabiraj (2018) conceptualizes the relation between China and US based on goods production and labour for trading purposes between the two economies. According to the author, the US can decide to produce high skilled goods and technology and trade with China, which produces low skilled goods. This means that the US economy can benefit more from China through the low-skilled

jobs that are offered in China. The most appealing findings by Kabiraj (2018) as regards the US-China trade relations are that the US economy has been positively impacted by the 2.6 million jobs created through the trade relations with China. This evidence indicates that the US has equally benefited from the economic cooperation with China. Generally, the US exports have attained tremendous growth just the same way the Chinese exports have gained dominance in the US market. Both countries have achieved positive trends in their economies as a result of the strong relations that have been in existence for long. China might have realised the benefit of the trade relations with the US; thus, China would want to sustain this relationship by ensuring there is a continuous economic cooperation.

The current trade wars between the US and China are contemporary international issues that had earlier been predicted in the literature. For instance, an article by Mearsheimer (2010), on the gathering storm between China and the US on the former challenging the latter's power in Asia. This article stipulated that order was being challenged and changes had started to take place with regards to power distribution. The argument in the article was that China was challenging the global power balance, and that there was a reduction in power gap between the US and China. This argument has been acknowledged in the present times with the US stating that the rise of China is a national security matter that should be contained through whichever means possible. Another relevant question asked by Mearsheimer (2010) was whether China would be allowed to rise peacefully while testing the primacy of the US as the global powerhouse. This question is partially being answered in present times as there are indications that the US is trying as much as possible to curb China from rising peacefully (Ikenson, 2017; Lazard, 2017). The trade wars being launched against China form part of the techniques by the US to contain China and prevent peaceful rise. At this time, it was also predicted in the past literature that there would be confrontations between the leading powerhouses due to the question of power balancing. As evidenced in the past literature, the

rising strategic confrontations were likely to lead to war in the near future as the US was likely to be aggressive in her relations with China. All of these predictions are historical but they have been consistent throughout the decade. Additional literature published after Mearsheimer (2010) corroborated his findings that there would be an impending trade war between the US and China. Most recently, before the start of the trade wars, several other authors had already predicted the likelihood of the confrontations becoming a reality especially under the Trump administration (Ikenson, 2017; Lazard, 2017; Morrison, 2017; Gompert, Cevallos & Garafola, 2016). Here, the implication is that there has been consistency in the literature pertaining to the issue of trade wars. It can be confirmed that the previous authors were right on this particular issue as their predictions have come to pass as evidenced by the current China-US trade war. The debate is outstanding, and it can be based on the previous predictions that might be seen as history but laid an essential background for current and future debates on the China-US relations.

The US and China have recently engaged in cold relationships especially following the agenda set by President Trump of reducing bilateral trade deficits existing between the two countries (Kabiraj, 2018). Trump has also imposed trade tariffs on China in addition to launching investigations on intellectual property rights infringement by China. To some extent, observers believe that Trump's actions might not only be about trade issues with China but as an iron-fist approach to contain nations that do not agree with his ideas such as immigration. Unfortunately, in his action, Trump tends to ignore the impact of his actions especially on countries that the US does not control such as China. Hence, there is the fear of repercussions from the targeted countries in case they decide to retaliate against the US. Based on these events, Kuo (2018) had earlier predicted the possibility of retaliation by China to counter the trade tariffs imposed by the US. However, one year later, even though there have been retaliatory warnings by China against the US, China has maintained her stance on

engaging in continuous economic cooperation. The following quote from the white paper titled 'The Facts and China's Position on China-US Trade Friction' by Information Office of the State Council (2018) demonstrates the perceptions of China toward the trade war.

Economic and trade relations have developed steadily since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and the US, with fruitful results achieved in trade and investment. China benefits remarkably from the strong synergy, while the US also reaps extensive economic benefits from the opportunities and results generated by China's growth. It is self-evident that a sound China-US economic and trade relationship is very important for both countries. Cooperation serves the interests of the two sides and conflict can only hurt both (p. 5).

The above quote from the White Paper indicates that China is aware of the trade wars but it has acknowledged that it would be appropriate to continue with maintaining an economic cooperation as it would be beneficial to both parties. The conclusion that can be made on this subsection of question 1 is that history has clearly demonstrated the economic relations between China and the US, which have been changing over time. The literature reviewed in this section indicates that the US has been a strong economic partner to China but impending power changes have been the main causes of the impasse. The current events have demonstrated that trade wars were started by the US and China does not consider other options than to retaliate or agree to be coerced by the US. The main problem that has not been fully explored is on the perceptions of the US of the impact of the trade wars on the economic cooperation with China. There is the need to demonstrate whether the US understands the repercussions and why she is not mindful of the negative impacts of the trade wars on its economy and diplomatic relations with China and the rest of the world. In relation to the research question, China has a role to play, and she had clearly indicated that she does

not want to engage in the heated trade war but would rather settle for a continued economic cooperation with the US for the benefit of both countries.

2.2.3 Protectionism

This subsection of the first research question has been considered for inclusion because it will help to examine the role of protectionism in the China-US trade war. An understanding of this concept will help to determine whether it is an appropriate tool to be used by the US against China as an approach of containing her economic rise. It is also at this stage that the propensity of China applying protectionism against the US is investigated, and the overall impacts of the approach on the two economies also evaluated.

Protectionism is defined as an economic phenomenon where a country protects its domestic industries by preventing the influx of imports through trade tariffs, import quotas, and any other restriction approach targeted at the foreign competitors (Fairbrother, 2014). In most cases, government tariffs form the greatest proportion of protectionism to make imports more expensive and less attractive to the consumers. However, according to Fairbrother (2014) economists believe that protectionism has negative impacts on trade. This may be due to the creation of an environment where consumers are forced to purchase locally produced products at the expense of the products manufactured in the foreign countries whose exports are being regulated. The imports are also likely to be highly priced as a result of the increased demand in a low supply market. This is contrary to free trade between countries, which has also been found to have positive impacts on economic growth. Furthermore, Waymouth (2010) argued that protectionism bars foreign direct investment (FDI) by preventing foreign investors from investing locally or acquiring domestic firms. History indicates that the US is the mother of modern protectionism since the 18th century. Her relationship with China has always been marred with protectionist tactics. In the recent past until presently, the

successive US administrations have been imposing trade tariffs on Chinese imports as an approach of protecting the domestic industries.

Three most recent US administrations have been considered for discussion in this section to lay down the background for pursuing this topic. They include the past two administrations and the current administration under President Trump. First, in 2002, the Bush administration imposed trade tariffs on steel imports from China. However, this protectionist approach failed as most studies conducted by 2005 on this particular issue found that it negatively affected the US economy and employment (Read, 2005). This means that the protectionist approach did not foresee a situation whereby it would cause more harm than good. History repeated itself during the Obama administration as if the US had not learned from the previous flop of the approach. According to a recent study by Chung, Lee and Osang (2016), the Obama administration imposed trade tariffs on Chinese tires in 2009 – 2012 as an anti-dumping initiative. Evidence indicates that this measure did not affect employment in the US tire industry even though it was targeting to improve employment in the domestic tire industry. This means that, just like during the Bush administration, the Obama administration's protectionist initiative failed to add value to the US economy (Chung, Lee & Osang, 2016). Hence, they were not justified if at all they were only aiming to contain China while at the same time not evaluating whether it would be beneficial to the US' economy. Currently, a repeat of protectionism has been initiated in the Trump administration. Unlike the Obama and Bush eras, Trump's era is the most relevant to this research because it is the most recent, and it is happening at the height of the trade wars. The focus is on the current trade wars and the role of protectionism in fanning the wars. However, the point of concern is on whether China should also apply protectionism as a retaliatory attack against the US. Another point of concern is on what is pushing China back from applying counter-measures if at all she is not being protectionist against the US even at the peak of the trade war.

There is enough literature on the issue of protectionism demonstrating the roles that it has played in the trade relations between China and the US (Bouët & Laborde, 2018; Lee, Park & Saravia, 2017; Scherrer & Abernathy, 2017; Barghini, 2018). In the protectionism debate, Bouët and Laborde (2018) examine the impact of a change in trade policies on trade wars. These authors, by using the Nash equilibrium to associate the quantity of duty with the net revenues generated from imports, concluded that there is no previous scenario where the US' GDP positively gained from the protectionist rhetoric (Bouët & Laborde, 2018). This implies that there are negative impacts of protectionism and the US has suffered a bigger share of the challenges as also evidenced in the previous scenarios where the Bush and Obama administrations applied it but the US did not benefit in any way (Read, 2005; Chung, Lee & Osang, 2016). The failure to earn any benefit from protectionism might be of great concern to China, which means that China is reluctant to do the same because of the uncertainties associated with the action. This is an aspect of antidumping laws that the US has been using against the targeted countries. The research by Lee, Park and Saravia (2017) found that the antidumping laws have always worked retrospectively because, whenever the US tends to limit imports from China, the other countries still export the same products to the US. This means that there might be no change in the volumes of imports of the same products entering the US markets. Based on this evidence, the reactions against the US trade tariffs by China are dependent on the past impacts of such interventions on the US economy. In fact, China would still export to other markets at the expense of exporting to the US, and as mentioned above, the other economies will still export the same commodities to the US to fill the commodity deficits in the US market.

The above argument proceeds to portray the current situation in the US-China trade war as the Trump administration is applying protectionism like the previous administrations. He came up with the slogan 'America First', which has so far been interpreted as a protectionist

approach. According to Scherrer and Abernathy (2017), President Trump has been associated with protectionism as evidenced by his support for border tax adjustments and cancellation of the Trans-Pacific partnership (TPP). In this case, his approach can be termed first-mover protectionism because it is aiming at protecting the interests of the US corporations especially based on the intellectual property rights as China is being accused of infringing on these rights. China is conceptualizing on how to respond to the protectionist threats being posed by the Trump administration especially after imposing trade tariffs on imports from China. Barghini (2018) quotes Ashmore's Dehn as saying, 'The Chinese will respond and are responding in a measured and proportionate way, matching the US measures blow-for-blow but not exceeding the US tariffs and not involving any third parties' (p. 19). This statement implies that China has no ill intentions in its retaliation against protectionism by the US, and that her counter-measures are commensurate in value and quantity with the measures imposed by the US. It also means that China is not immensely interested in fanning the trade war when she can easily resolve the issue through an act of omission. Omission is used in this case to mean failure to take an action against the US to balance the equation. Another relevant quote by Ashmore's Dehn from the same source detailing the Chinese response on protectionism is that:

If Trump becomes more protectionist and pulls America out of the whole world, China will actually be more open to doing trade with other countries; to step in where the Americans are pulling back, just like the Chinese have done in [the TransPacific Partnership]. China ultimately sees the protectionism in the United States as contributing to the decline of the role of the [dollar] as the global reserve currency and, ultimately, that works in favor of the Chinese as they assume the crown of global currency over the next few years (p. 19).

According to the above quote, China is less interested in the protectionist war with the US. Instead, she intends to focus more on the other trade partners to fill the deficit. Moreover, China has realised that protectionism has previously negatively impacted on the US economic dominance in other global market, and she has taken advantage of the vacuum to advance her trade. With such realisations, it means that, even if China may apply a protectionist approach, she is just cushioning herself from losses thus the need to balance and avoid trade deficits. Hence, to formally respond to the research question, protectionism is not an approach that China intends to use against the US but she is likely to take advantage of the situation created by protectionism to advance her trade intentions across the globe. To some extent, China might be hoping that the US will self-destruct because protectionism has never worked in its favour as evidenced by the historical events pertaining to the previous administrations and their declaration of protectionism.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSION

This research has been conducted for the purpose of dissecting the current trade wars between China and the US. It is a topic that has attracted research in the current times as there is limited research on the issue even though it has been in the public domain for quite long but perpetuated to achieve different intentions. The current research is aimed at advancing the knowledge on this topic as it is dynamic, and new evidence is emerging every time. Some of the studies that were conducted more than 8 years ago vividly discussed this issue but the limitation of the studies is that they focused on assumptions in predicting the future of trade wars between the US and her long-term economic rival – China. The past studies lay an appropriate background on which the current and the future research on trade wars should be anchored. The issue of trade wars has been rampant in the past and during the current decades based on the foreign policies of various countries. The current debate is progressive and focus has been directed on the US-China relations. Part of the history acknowledges that China and the US have gone through low and high tides in their bilateral relations. It has been detailed in the literature that most of the former US presidents have had a fair share of diplomatic squabbles with China during their reign. All rows have been attributed to trade-related issues where China has been accused on several occasions for actions that the US believes are of great concern to her national security and to the global power balance.

The most interesting part of this debate is that the previous US administrations under Presidents Bush and Obama were committed to the course of trade wars by imposing tariffs on Chinese imports. The intention was to specifically advance protectionist motives as a technique of growing the domestic industries. However, as evidence indicates, none of them managed to contain China through protectionism. In fact, evidence shows that the US suffered setbacks by adopting protectionism because it did not have any positive impact on the GDP, neither did it create more job opportunities for the US citizens as initially

insinuated. In fact, evidence indicates that the US made economic losses every time she tried to apply this technique with the motive of containing China's economic rise. The protectionist lens of view is the most appropriate tool used in dissecting the current US-China trade wars. In fact, the research problem has been identified from the concepts of protectionism and how the US strategizes operations at the height of the aggressive Chinese ascension to becoming a global economic powerhouse. However, as earlier indicated, China has no intention of challenging the US hegemony due to her alignment to the political philosophy of keeping a low profile. On its part, the US does not trust China and she believes that China is up to something cynical that should be addressed coercively. Relentlessly, the Trump administration is leaving no stone unturned in its quest to ensure that China does not succeed in her pursuit of global dominance. Given that the past trade wars flopped, why would Trump think that the current trade wars will succeed against China? This is the problem statement that has been addressed in this research by evaluating the historical relations and juxtaposing with the US plans against China. Therefore, a picture is created depicting the trade war as a superficial indicator of the hidden problems that are fanning the US-China impasse. In investigating this issue, the research has focused on linking the fight for political, economic, and technological supremacy with the current trade wars. These elements form the first research question while the second research question addresses the reactions and countermeasures that China is applying, and the analysis has been based on economic cooperation, diplomatic relations, and protectionism.

Regarding the first research question on the role of economic, technological, and political supremacy in the US-China trade wars is relevant as it attempts to surpass the usual rhetoric on trade-related conflicts, and focuses more on the possible issues that characterise stand-offs between the world's greatest economic powerhouses such as China and the US. In dissecting the trade war from the perspective of this question, the research finds out that the US is

pursuing other interests with hidden agenda but camouflaging in trade wars with China. The research finds that the main agenda is to contain China with the purpose of slowing down her ascension to economic dominance. Through the literature analysis, the research has identified converging evidence indicating that China is rising with high speeds in political, economic, and technological spheres. Economically, China has the dream of 'Made in China 2025' initiative that intends to advance the development of home grown industries through enhanced manufacturing processes. On the other hand, the Trump administration is focusing on 'America First'; however, the US is accusing China for protectionism and yet both countries can be said to be protectionists. In addition, the Chinese GDP is growing fast, and her global dominance has spread all over East Asia, Europe, and it is presently visible in the African continent. The US is weary of this aggressive economic growth, and that is why trade wars are believed to be among the techniques that the US believes will help in containing the Chinese dominance.

The other factor that has been covered in this research is the scramble for political supremacy. Evidence indicates that the US and China are in conflict especially regarding the control of the South China Sea and alliance with Taiwan. The US understands that the South China Sea is a vital sea transport channel used for the transportation of millions of tonnes of goods across the world and yet she is claiming a stake. Moreover, the US is aware that China has the intention of reclaiming Taiwan back to the mainland but she is imparting external interference through military deals. Another finding as regards this issue is that China has entered into alliances with Russia and made critical decisions on political issues such as the war in Syria, in addition to influencing the African political landscape. It can be concluded that the US fears the impending political dominance by China which might impair her hegemony. Hence, the only way out of this fear is to contain China and frustrate its

dominance in the global geopolitics. As such, the research asserts that trade war is an approach that is aimed at advancing US' offensive against China's political aggression.

The third issue is on technological supremacy. China is developing fast in terms of technological advancements. The manufacturing processes in China have been advanced through sophisticated technology. China is also adept in artificial intelligence. The only problem that the US identifies with regard to technological supremacy is that China has continuously infringed on the intellectual property rights of all technology firms operating within her borders. This is an issue that the US is not taking lightly, and it has been cited severally by the Trump administration. Hence, the only way out is to contain China through trade wars. However, this research does not predict the relationship between the current trade wars and the success by the US in containing China's technological advances and infringement on intellectual property rights of foreign firms. This is an appropriate research subject for the future research.

The second research question is on the countermeasures that China has considered taking to salvage the soiled relationship with the US. The three factors discussed in the research include economic cooperation, diplomacy, and protectionism. The research finds that China understands the benefits of having a positive trade environment to enhance the economic growth of both countries. However, the US is intending to be the winner in this case at the expense of China's capacity as an advanced economy. Despite the US' frustration of China's growth, on her end, China still believes that having a positive bilateral relationship with the US is appropriate for advancing bilateral trade. Hence, China is yet to apply punitive retaliation against the US' vendetta. This links to the diplomatic nature of China. This research has unearthed the history of China's diplomatic characteristics and found that it was established by the past leaders who initiated the keeping low policy that prohibits China from taking an international responsibility. The initiators of this policy were for the opinion that it

would create a serene environment that would enable China to rise peacefully. As a matter of fact, China had already confirmed to the US that it does not intend to challenge the US hegemony. Therefore, based on these particular issues, the research confirms that, indeed, China is more interested in applying diplomacy in solving the impasse with the US rather than perpetuating any other engagement that might worsen the situation or even create a global power shift with the potency to shake the world order.

The other aspect of the second research question is the idea of protectionism and whether China is applying the same to match the US. As earlier discussed, the Chinese policies and initiatives such as Made in China are in the offing but this research does not find any evidence accusing China of being the first to impose trade tariffs on the US imports with the intention of protecting her domestic manufacturing firms. However, on the other hand, the US has been at the forefront in imposing trade tariffs whenever the idea of containment comes up. According to this research, China has a chance to retaliate by imposing similar trade tariffs with the intent to balance trade but not to punish the US exporters. The research also insinuates that China is aware that protectionism has not been beneficial to the US; therefore, it is not a call for alarm. However, China is aware that the protectionist approach being applied by the US might be intending to contain her rise and positioning in the global geopolitics.

Lastly, the research has demystified the *Thucydides's Trap* thesis to dissect the measures and counter-measures being undertaken by China to address the US-China trade war. In his research, Allison used the *Thucydides's Trap* thesis to analyse 16 cases that portray similar characteristics as the China-US impasse, and found that 12 of them later became trapped. This means that the 12 cases were associated with military aggression. Hence, in this case, there are predictions that China-US impasse might progress into the brink of military engagement. Whether China or the US is ready for such outcomes is not yet known and only

predictions and assumptions can be made at this time. This research does not make a definitive conclusion on this matter but there are high chances that the outcomes might be negative if ceasefire is not considered urgently. However, the research confirms that China, as a keen follower of diplomatic philosophy, might play a role to salvage the situation by avoiding further confrontation with the US no matter how much she will be irked by the US' aggression.

The strength of this study is that it investigates an issue that has been in the public domain for some time but with numerous uncertainties. Hence, the research attempts to fill the existing knowledge gaps and advance research processes on the issue of China-US trade war. This will also lay the background for the future research on this topic. The other positive factor in conducting this research is that there exists a relatively big number of literature from the past covering the China-US relations although the issues are contemporary. This helps to lay the background to the problem and enable the researcher to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in the evidence over a length of time. On the contrary, the research has faced various limitations. The first limitation is that the topic is dynamic; thus part of the research relies on assumptions because academic research has not been fully developed on the most recent issues surrounding the US-China stand-off. Another limitation is that there are few peer-reviewed research articles that have already been published on the US-China trade wars, thus allowing only a narrow perception of the situation. Nevertheless, only a few of the available studies on the topic have managed to outline the underlying factors in the US-China trade wars. Therefore, the future researchers should consider applying quantitative research approaches to determine the correlations that exist between various variables associated with the China-US trade wars. It is believed that the issue will be appropriately outlined in the future, which means that it will be easy to carry out research without facing theoretical limitations in the research process.

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