

# Is **Thucydides Trap** between the US and China avoidable?

Guests?

Announcements?

Have you silenced your cell?

Please hold your questions till the end. Thanks. 😊

# Thucydides Trap between the U.S. & China avoidable?

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Allison's Atlantic Magazine article:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/201509/united-stats-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

# 1. What is the Thucydide's trap?

- **Thucydides** was a Greek historian in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC who soulfully narrated the Peloponnesian War between Sparta, the established power, and Athens, the rising power. The war ruined both. He identified “Fear, honor and interest”, as the major elements that led to the war. Thucydides wanted **YOU & ME** to learn from his work.
- “**Thucydides Trap**” was a term coined by Graham Allison, former Dean of Kennedy School of Government, Harvard. It hints that a war between the U.S. , the established power, and China, a rising power may be unavoidable. 2 years ago, Steve K. Bannon said that the war was inevitable within the next “5 to 10 years”\*.

\*[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-xi-summit\\_us\\_58e52f20e4b064cb30e761a](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-xi-summit_us_58e52f20e4b064cb30e761a)

# 1. Cont. 16 traps in the last 500 yrs, 12 ended in wars - Kennedy School, Harvard

No	Period	Ruling Power	Rising Power	Domain	Result
1	Late 15 <sup>th</sup> century	 Portugal	 Spain	Global empire and trade	No war
2	First half of 16 <sup>th</sup> century	 France	 Hapsburgs	Land power in western Europe	War
3	16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries	 Hapsburgs	 Ottoman Empire	Land power in central and eastern Europe, sea power in the Mediterranean	War
4	First half of 17 <sup>th</sup> century	 Hapsburgs	 Sweden	Land and sea power in northern Europe	War
5	Mid-to-late 17 <sup>th</sup> century	 Dutch Republic	 England	Global empire, sea power, and trade	War
6	Late 17 <sup>th</sup> to mid-18 <sup>th</sup> centuries	 France	 Great Britain	Global empire and European land power	War
7	Late 18 <sup>th</sup> and early 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries	 United Kingdom	 France	Land and sea power in Europe	War
8	Mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century	 France and United Kingdom	 Russia	Global empire, influence in Central Asia and eastern Mediterranean	War

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# 1. Cont.

16 traps in the last 500 yrs,  
12 ended in wars

9	Mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century	 France	 Germany	Land power in Europe	War
10	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries	 China and Russia	 Japan	Land and sea power in East Asia	War
11	Early-20 <sup>th</sup> century	 United Kingdom	 United States	Global economic dominance and naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere	No war
12	Early-20 <sup>th</sup> century	 United Kingdom <small>supported by France, Russia</small>	 Germany	Land power in Europe and global sea power	War
13	Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century	 Soviet Union, France, UK	 Germany	Land and sea power in Europe	War
14	Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century	 United States	 Japan	Sea power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region	War
15	1940s–1980s	 United States	 Soviet Union	Global power	No war
16	1990s–present	 United Kingdom and France	 Germany	Political influence in Europe	No war

Allison's Atlantic Magazine article:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/201509/united-stats-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

## 2. Major elements leading to war

Thucydides identified that major elements leading to the Peloponnesian war were:

**Fear, Honor and Interest**

Gen. McMaster, National Security Advisor, and General James Mattis, our Defense Secretary, both agreed.

McMaster: “People fight today for the same fundamental reasons the Greek historian Thucydides identified .... ”

Mattis similarly identified these as “the root cause of why a nation choose to go to hostilities”

Quoted from Allyson's Thucydides's Trap:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-xi-summit\\_us\\_58e52f20e4b064cb30e761a](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-xi-summit_us_58e52f20e4b064cb30e761a)

## 2. Examining the 3 major elements: **A) FEAR**

- U.S.'s Fear: (1) Being too accommodating to a rising power may result in fanning the ambition of that power. Keep the Munich Agreement prior to WWII in mind. [Do Nazi Germany & PRC share the same national "DNA"?]  
(2) China's phenomenal increase in **capacity** (a realist like

S. Bannon's fear: Capacity not behavior! Scaring view.)

	China, as % of U.S.	
	1980	2014
<b>GDP (PPP)</b>	10	101
<b>GDP (US\$)</b>	7	60
<b>Exports (US\$)</b>	6	106
<b>Reserves (US\$)</b>	17	2800

## 2. A). FEAR - - Fears of the U.S. & China

- US Fear (3): The change in relative power could tip the balance in such a way that the U.S. may not recover. Why we can be more relaxed.
- China's Fear: The U.S. may use its unsurpassed military prowess to contain China, denying China's legitimate desire to be a developed nation e.g. cutting off China's vital sea lane in South China sea; using the THAAD stationed in S. Korea to deter China's 2<sup>nd</sup> strike ability. [US has not declared "No first use" of nuclear weapons. China has since 1964\*.]



## 2. Examining the 3 major elements: **B) HONOR**

US: We must **honor** our mutual defense treaty obligations. (30 strong + 10 weak) Any action by China that triggers our treaty obligations could lead to war, as a matter of honor.

China: having suffered 150 years of humiliation by western colonial powers and Japan, defending the integrity of China's sovereignty is **a matter of honor**. The areas including Taiwan, Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku in Japan) in East China Sea, and islands within the 9 dotted lines in the South China Sea. China has 1 weak mutual defense treaty with N. Korea.

## 2. Examining the 3 major elements: C) INTEREST

“Interest” could mean economic interest, human and raw resources. It could also mean national prestige and pride. Both sides have actually managed interest conflicts rather well so far.

- There are 4 ongoing high level US-China dialogues\*\*:
  1. Security
  2. economy
  3. cyberspace and law enforcement\*
  4. societal and civic
- Trade: China has promised to decrease US trade deficit. Some progress but not huge.
- Currency manipulation: Not true since Jan. 2016. China has been manipulating to prop up its currency.
- Taiwan: Taiwan independence & arms sale are now less of a problem. China is sure of a historic force pushing for unification.
- Diaoyu (Senkakus) Islands: tension but no sparks
- China’s new economic initiatives are all inclusive, inviting the US to participate
  - i) Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
  - ii) One Belt one Road.

\*U.S. & China has signed an agreements in 2015 not to conduct state-sponsored cyberattacks against each other to steal private sector secrets and other confidential business information: US <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IN10376.pdf>; with Canada in 2017 <https://www.google.com/#q=Canada+China+cyberspace+agreements>

\*\*Set up during Xing’s visit in April 2012 at Mar-a-lago with Trump

## 2.C) INTEREST

continued

In contrast the US initiative, under Pres. Obama, on TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) **excluded** China. Trump has backed out of the TPP.

There are 2 more volatile issues:

- South China Sea: China's attempt to reach bilateral agreement with neighbors (e.g. the Philippines) may help [much more on that later]
- The THAAD\* (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) stationed in S. Korea is viewed by China as an US attempt to deter its 2<sup>nd</sup> strike ability. But the "One in Olympics" agreed upon by N&S Korea should greatly reduce tension in that area now for a foreseeable future.

### 3. What'll trigger the Trap in modern times?

**A) Fear? NO! Fear** is now a factor to STOP a war than to starting a war, owing to the FEAR of a nuclear war.

**Evidence?** (i) The cold war with the Soviets from 1940s to 1980s didn't end in a hot war. (ii) Even a 3<sup>rd</sup> tier power like N. Korea has successfully stymied the combined power the U.S., China and Russia to force it to give up its nuclear weapons.

**B) Honor? No!** There are 3 treaty-related issues (i) Taiwan (weak) (ii) Japan (strong) and (iii) N Korea (weak). None of which is likely to lead to military conflict between the U.S. and China after the "One in Olympics."

**C) Conflict of interests? NO!** Geopolitics which emphasizes the competition for human and economic resources will soon be secondary issues. **Evidence?**

### 3. C) Why Sc. &Tech will soon make “Interests” obsolete

(i) Peoples in both the reigning and rising powers are NOT worried about their sustenance. Technology’s ability to make less do more have made such traditional conflicts less important.

(ii) The day of “**Singularity**” is expected to arrive around 2040, only 22 years from today. It is the time when artificial intelligence will surpass human intelligence. **Jobs?** The days of **negative tax** will be coming!

(iii) Most work, including writing software, will be done by robots more intelligent than we are. That’ll lead to an **explosion of knowledge AND new resources** that will again decrease the chance of a war for “concrete” interests.

### 3. C) Why Tech. will make “Interests” less important Cont

(iv) Technology is self-accelerating, so conflicts over resources will likely NEVER be a cause for war again. Future wars are likely caused by conflicts over **EGOs**.

Why did we fight the Vietnam war, knowing that we couldn't win? “To preserve American prestige.”

**Evidence:**

(a) The Pentagon papers (b) “The Post” movie, & c) PBS's 10-hour “War in Vietnam”.

Why did we fight in Iraq? An optional war.  
Why in Afghanistan? Bin laden has died long ago.

3.D. What'll trigger the Trap in modern times?

d. **Mankind's Irrational desire to be the "TOP DOG":**

Technology has improved by leaps & bounds. However, **Human nature** hasn't changed much.

We are probably as loving & hateful; as generous & greedy; as wise & childish, as war-loving & peace-loving, and as humble and desiring to be the "TOP DOG", as 2500 yrs. ago when Thucydides lived. **Evidence?**

Pres. Trump's National Security Strategy is an example. What has China done to us & the world to be named as our "number 1 worry" now?

### 3.D. What'll trigger the Trap in modern times – cont.

#### What kind of irrational emotion?

Arrogance in the rising power, and jealousy in the established power could still trigger the trap nowadays.

- **Arrogance**, often the emotion of the citizenry of a rising power, is a range of mental disposition to disregard the proper rights of others, typified by haughtiness & self-assumption. Remember Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe at the U.N. and shouting, “We’ll bury you.”?

The Chinese government has not shown arrogance, to my knowledge. However, Chinese bloggers have done so very often – curbed by the government now.



### 3.D. Jealousy & arrogance could trigger the trap nowadays

- **Jealousy:** The French resentment towards Americans after WWII is one example. People's common resentment toward the "nouveau riche" is another. Jealousy is caused by "insecurity, fear, concern, and anxiety over an anticipated loss of status" which result in anger and resentment, and demonization of one's opponent. Any policy examples? Pres. Trump's National Security Strategy which is replete with warnings about China. What has China done to the world that we haven't done? What nations has China invaded? Why focus on China?

## 4. Ways to prevent triggering the trap:

[A] The Traditional Way – to create lots of win-win, and

[B] **The Untraditional Way - to prevent lose-lose.**

A1) China needs to open its growing consumer market to the US **much more**. China must let US reap the benefits of China's rise in economic capacity

A2) Both need to find projects that are **so difficult and yet necessary to both** that the we will **want** to work together. The best hypothetical example is when Martians invade the earth\*. The best real example may be to working together to prevent climate change. (Pres. Trump said\*\* we might rejoin Paris Agreement to reduce climate change.)

US trade deficit against China: <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html>

\*Pres. Reagan was the first to raise that point of view with Gorbachev

\*\*<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42642331>

## 4 A. Creating win-win Continued

A3) We get serious about preventing conflicts:

U.S. & China **have signed an agreement in 2015: Not to conduct state-sponsored cyber attacks to steal private sector secrets.** A similar one was signed with Canada on June 23, **2017.**

A4) Working together to rebuild U.S. infrastructure:

CRRC, a Chinese train manufacturer, has signed contracts with the cities of Los Angeles, Chicago & Boston worth \$647 m, \$1.3 b and \$933 m respectively, for subway improvement; with CRRC investing heavily in the initial phase of the joint venture.

## 4. Ways to prevent triggering the trap

[B] The Untraditional Way: Preventing lose-lose

“Make **painful adjustments in attitude & action** not just of the challenger but also the challenged ... by leaders and **citizens alike**\* ” – Graham Allison

### HOW?

By agreeing to greatly publish & disseminate, once every quarter, corrective information written by the other nation pointing to erroneous reports published by the media's host nation. The other side dictates the contents.

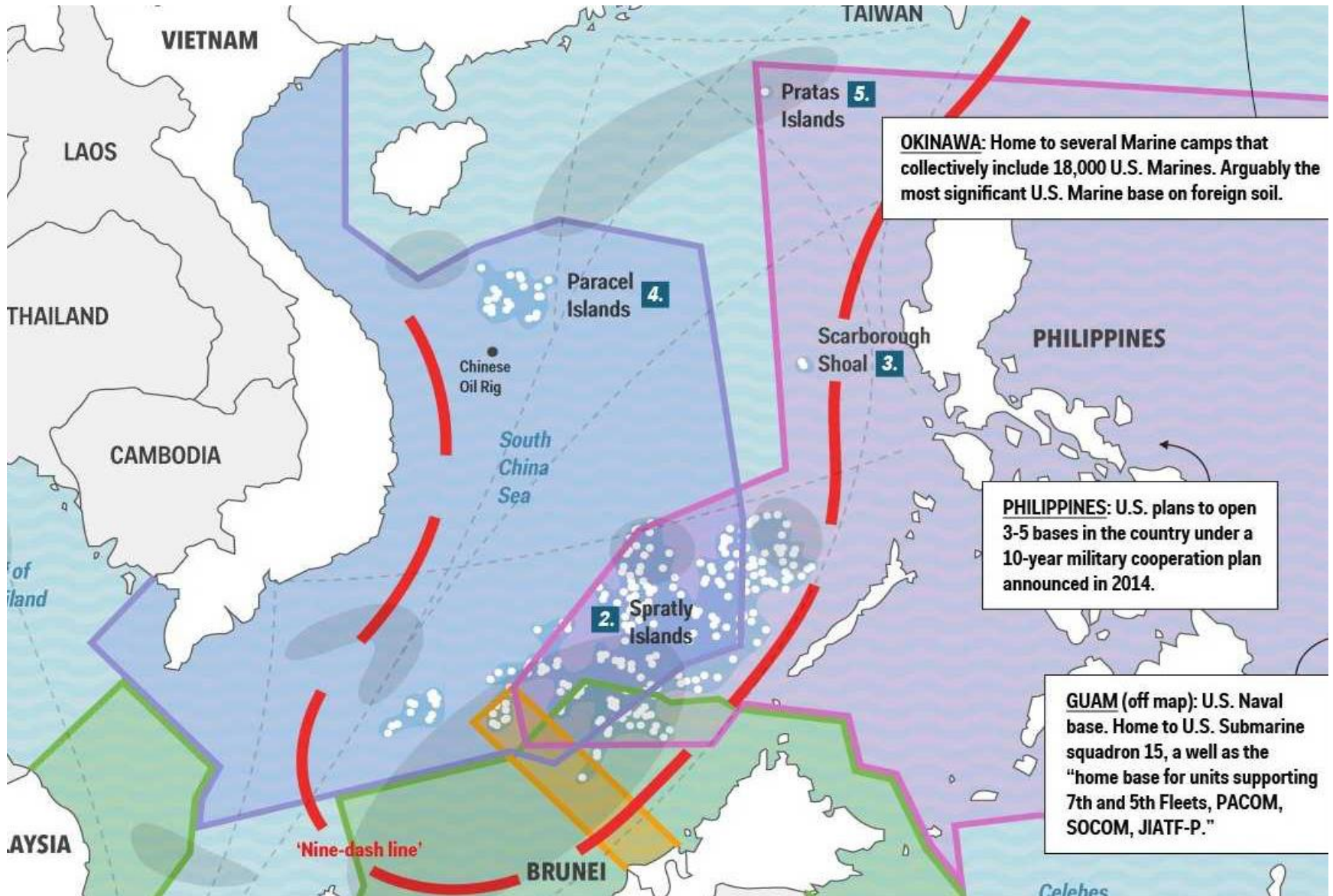
### WHY?

**Media** on both sides tend to **demonize the other nation** – a slow but sure way of sowing the seeds of irrational emotion, leading to war. **Evidence?**

#### 4. [B] Preventing lose-lose continued

Even the info we get from NYT, Washington Post, & WSJ on China is often inaccurate or intentionally misleading. Why? Our media, just like those of China and other nations, has a nationalistic bend. **Evidence?**

1. Try to recall how China was reported back in 1972 during Pres. Nixon's effort to "open China" or to use China as a counter to Soviet Union? All good! Compare those report with how China is reported nowadays. Mostly bad. **Why?**
2. Is China's behavior as bad in South China Sea as the reports you've read or heard?



Blue is Vietnamese claims, Purple is Philippines' claim, China's claim are the dashed lines

# The Disputes in South China Sea

- 1) How that region is named? **“S. China Sea”!** Historically, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, & Philippines have **for centuries** referred to it as the South China Sea. **Vietnam didn't.**
- 2) Claimed areas: Vietnam & Philippines has laid huge claims too. See attached map. Vietnam has built up at least 10 islands also. However, scale-wise, **China's build up is much larger.**
- 3) 9 dashed lines: It started with 11 dashed lines, established by the Republic of China (**Taiwan**) on **Dec. 1, 1947**. Indeed, China (People's Rep. of China) under Chou En-Lai took off 2 dashes to accommodate Vietnam.
- 4) Arbitral tribunal (not an internal court, China didn't agree to the arbitration) ruled against China's historic claim in favor of the Philippines. Subsequently, the Philippines & China agreed on maintaining status quo over all disputed areas i.e. both will stop building new islands.

# Concluding Summary:

(1) To stop triggering the “Thucydides Trap” between the US and China, we must

“Make **painful adjustments in attitude & action** not just of the challenger but also the challenged ... by leaders and **citizens alike** ” – Graham Allison.

A tiny example of “pain” for you and me: a) **for me** to make this presentation, and 2) **for you** to hear what is being reported to you by me.

However, both may be necessary to prevent **human beings’ irrational desire** to be the TOP DOG to the detriment of truth, our properties, lives, and world PEACE.



# Concluding Summary: (2)

(2) Why our hearts & minds are more important than the geopolitical factors:

i) All big wars have begun within the hearts of citizens of the warring nations. Evidence?

Am. Civil War: a scene in “Gone with the wind” showing the jubilation of Southerners when the news of the war came.

WWI: a chapter in “All quiet in the western front” describing the elation of high school students & teachers when the news of the war came.

WWII: the hatred between the French and German prior to the war was well-established.

(2) Why our hearts & minds are more important than the geopolitical factors

ii) Individuals who have lived in both lands and who are acutely interested in forging peace between the 2 nations may be **more aware** that media in both nations are biased to “demonization” the other side. Thucydides was one. I may be another of many first generation Chinese Ams. who are aware of such damning defects. So I decide to take up Allison’s challenge: “**painful** adjustments in attitude & action” when there is still time.

## Concluding Summary: (3)

(3) What are our choices?

Door Number 1. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists warned several day ago:

“Doomsday clock advances 30 seconds close to symbolic ‘apocalyptic’ midnight” - - the closest since 1953

Door Number 2: Henry Kissinger advised:

To improve “**the most Important bilateral relationship**” in the world. However, to improve that relationship is IMPOSSIBLE unless we let the other nation correct our “fake news” about it, and vice versa. **ONLY then do we begin to address the REAL cause of war – the HATE planted in our hearts, by the natural nationalist inclination of media of EVERY NATION, aided by the natural ready reception of such misinformation by every patriotic citizens of EVERY NATION.** Are we doomed? Break the trap!!

