

Issue Linkage in The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Is It Opportunity To Solve Security Dilemma Of Territorial Disputes In South China Sea?

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Abstract

This paper examines the relevance of using issue linkage by both China and ASEAN countries in their endeavour to solve conflicts and tensions arising from territorial disputes in South China Sea. The paper makes a theoretical analysis of how to solve territorial disputes in South China Sea by utilizing a fusion of issue linkage and the Chinese lead Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Using the concept of issue linkage and applying it to the MSR, the paper argues that the economic interdependence and regional integration issues in MSR have got the potential to gradually solve territorial disputes in South China Sea through transforming economic benefit issues into spill-over security functions.

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It argues that the MSR is an opportunity for both China and ASEAN to develop and strengthen economic engagement. Regional integration and connectivity such that these aspects could motivate both parties to collectively advance economic integration and interdependence and in the long run solve security challenges ensuing in the region.

Key Words: Issue Linkage; 21st Century Maritime Silk Road; Security Dilemma; South China Sea; Economic Interdependence.

1. Introduction

This research paper addresses the fundamental question of whether issue linkage in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is an opportunity to reduce and solve the security dilemma of territorial disputes in South China Sea between China on one hand and ASEAN and the U.S on the other. The paper addresses this question from the fusion of issue linkage theory and MSR. Ever since President Xi Jinping of China unveiled and announced before Parliament of Indonesia the MSR on 3rd October, 2013 with the main purpose of promoting and deepening regional economic integration and cooperation, opening up maritime - based trade corridors, infrastructure development and coordinated economic production; many scholars and policy analysts in the field of International Relations have been questioning and analysing the real reasons behind the construction of the MSR across a region (South China Sea) where there are serious issues of security dilemma related to territorial disputes [1]. Not only scholars and policy analysts have been interested in understanding this, but ASEAN countries and other global powers too. ASEAN countries have questioned whether the real meaning of the initiative could be grounded in the desire to stimulate opening up of regional trade corridors, economic growth and cooperation for the benefit of both China and its ASEAN partners through win-win development approach. Further to this, even some global powers like the US, Japan and India have been interested in knowing the real motives of China for conceptualizing such a development initiative. Of particular interest to ASEAN and these regional powers has been an issue of understanding whether the development initiative was conceived out of sheer need to address issues of political and security interests in the South China Sea region. While it is widely

recognized that the MSR can strengthen and further solidify the regional trade and continental cooperation and economic interdependence [2], both ASEAN countries and the U.S. are still questioning whether there are security and political dimensions attached to the initiative. As a result of this suspicion, it appears there is an increasing general perception that China might want to garner and manipulate ASEAN support for the initiative to strengthen and consolidate its geopolitical position and influence, regional leadership and national interests. Without necessarily negating whether the Chinese main focus through MSR is to establish regional leadership and geopolitical position in SCS, this paper explores and examines an argument that promotion of the MSR is an opportunity to reduce, alleviate and solve the security dilemma of territorial disputes. Viewing MSR from the lens of solving territorial disputes, the paper argues that the initiative through issue linkage will provide massive benefits to both China and ASEAN countries in areas of regional economic integration, collaborative economic production and cooperative understanding based on win-win collaboration. It is therefore argued that the economic dimension of MSR could develop into a spill-over security function which will be geared towards maintenance of security, peace and stability. These massive benefits would be necessary catalysts for removing animosity amongst the parties, eliminate miscalculations and misjudgement on Nation-States' positioning in the sea. The benefits could come at the right time for both ASEAN countries and China when Asian economies are going through difficulties, global and regional trade is contracting and most importantly when the geopolitical risks are still rising despite the recent ruling on the sea disputes by the International Arbitration Court on the issue the Philippines brought to the court. Through this initiative, the paper argues that there could be high chance for China and ASEAN to avoid pursuing self-serving mission [3]; and instead follow a peaceful, collaborated and integrated development path. The paper will examine these issues by employing the theoretical concepts of issue linkage in MSR and security dilemma of territorial disputes. The examination of security dilemma will show how geopolitical issues have seriously affected the development of security dilemma in the region while the discussion under the opportunities of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road will use issue linkage theory to put up an argument that the economic, cultural, security and political benefits of the initiative could be a fundamental opportunity to solve the tensions and conflicts. This will be the case because the Maritime Silk Road would in the long run promote economic interdependence, regional integration and economic cooperation,

build trust among concerned states, minimise suspicions, misperceptions and miscalculations on security matters and geopolitical positioning by various players in the region. Most importantly, this will in the long run contribute towards advancing promotion of peace, security and stability of the Southeast Asian region as it places substantial amount of state responsibility to minimise tensions, conflicts and collisions. To this effect, it becomes fundamentally necessary to thoroughly examine first, the theoretical concepts of security dilemma, issue linkage in MSR and discuss the relevance of the initiative as a silent strategy of solving security dilemma.

2. Security Dilemma in South China Sea

Security Dilemma, one of the main emerging and prevailing global challenge in South China Sea (SCS), which it is believed could be addressed through issue linkage in MSR, is defined by as *“a situation wherein two or more states are drawn into conflict, possibly even war, over security concerns, even though none of the states actually desire conflict”* [4]. This definition is grounded in the phenomena that states concerned, sometimes significantly feel insecure in relation to each other such that the only plausible option of their survival and security is considered none other than self-help through milking the logic of structural realism. Kanji argues that in anarchic international system, states will not depend on the help of other states for their survival, as a result it becomes a must for them to seek their own protection. In the process of protecting themselves, nation-states can act militarily or diplomatically to secure their survival. This process of making oneself secure might be interpreted by other states as threatening, hence each state could pursue what called as the logic of Hobbesian condition [5]. The Hobbesian condition would demand that each state has to read each other's intentions and motives carefully so that it is not eliminated. This kind of understanding induces all the states to develop their military capability as they are not sure whether other states might follow cooperative security policies. Author [6] put it openly that security-seeking states will only be motivated to choose competitive policies when the international environment is the source of the competition, otherwise such states lack fundamental conflicts of interest that could derive arms race, military modernization and crises. In case of SCS's territorial disputes, it would appear that major actors like China, ASEAN and U.S are motivated by the issue of geopolitics and lack of proper information on what each other's intentions and motives are. But what really is geopolitics and how

does it contribute towards the development of security dilemma in contentious geo-environments?

The concept of geopolitics in the affairs of international politics is a highly significant theoretical concept as it deals with issues of survival amidst the challenging environment of competition for securing state interests and security. Since states would like to secure strategic interests, there is intense and stiff competition among them. But in any case, history has proved that the strong and powerful states are able to claim what amounts to be the prerogative of the mighty regardless of whether they are violating purported international law; if it is perceived to be in conflict with their interests [7]. Of particular importance to states is the ability to effectively compete for exercise of the prerogative of the mighty on aspects of politics, resources, space, geography and strategy. The aspect of space in the context of geopolitics deals with issues of territory, sea and air which are very helpful in sustaining human life on earth otherwise they succumb to natural death easily. Significantly, politics is more concerned with the ability to exercise power over other states, institutions and people at local, regional and international level. Based on the foregoing, we deduce that geopolitics is the strategic exercise of power over space that might not necessarily be one's own with the aim of manipulating the space itself to achieve political objectives. This definition is also in agreement with the views of [8] who considered geopolitics as the study of International Relations from spatial, geographical and resource security perspectives. In his understanding, Parker argues that resource security is concerned with how resources are exploited and used by interested parties while geographical dimension deals with issues of national interests. The emphasis of states securing space and resources which might not necessarily be one's own implies that all states especially big powers would be in intense competition to secure these. Alternatively, at international level it signifies that one country could be able at its own might to manipulate other countries to achieve its purported geopolitical interests. But how does one state manipulate other countries to achieve its geopolitical interests? Mostly, countries strive to achieve geopolitical interests through careful state-crafting of geo-strategies and development policies. While geopolitics is basically policy oriented, geo-strategy is concerned with the process of getting something done to achieve the objectives of geopolitics. These issues develop into state of security dilemma as defined above, because while every state is interested in its own interests and security, none is prepared to be caught

unprepared.

In case of the competition in SCS between the parties mentioned above, the task is to unpack what could be the best Chinese geo-strategy to solve the security dilemma of territorial disputes while at the same time promoting economic interdependence and regional integration. Issue linkage in the MSR is examined as the plausible mechanism for solving, reducing and eliminating security dilemma. Therefore, our attention will now be focused on examining the concept of issue linkage in MSR.

3. Issue Linkage Theory

When author [9] wrote in his Research Paper titled Issue Linkage in Foreign Policy that “*some countries, such as the U.S, have returned to issue linkage foundation of tying security to trade*”, he touched on an important theoretical concept in International Relations which is the bedrock of negotiations between countries which basically could have been pursuing competitive and conflicting policies, but because of possible benefits and concessions in one policy area by one state, another state may be induced to change its stand on another contentious policy area. In fact, issue linkage theory refers to the negotiation strategy which involves combining multiple issues to change the balance of interests in favour of negotiated agreement on critical and contentious issues [10]. The fundamental principle of issue linkage lies on consistently coupling two or more foreign policy areas over time so that the issues could eventually form a coherent – strategic regional identity, symmetric in its structure so as to promote institutional isomorphism in national agencies responsible for implementation of development policies. This implies that the main goal of issue linkage is to promote development of common policies that could assist in realising regional integration and economic interdependence. There are generally two schools of thoughts on use of issue linkage as an approach to solving ideological, security, political, economic and territorial disputes matters. The first school of thought which leans towards optimistic dimension of issue linkage takes the view that the concept is a strategy of solving peacefully disputes by combining multiple issues so as to change balance of interests in favour of negotiated agreement on contentious issues [11, 12], such as the case of China and ASEAN Countries territorial disputes in SCS. This school of thought

emphasize that concessions in form of carrots are used as inducements for demanding particular changes in one policy as a precondition for accessing benefits of the other policy.

The second school of thought views the concept as a long term strategy of gaining more benefits by the challenger when he initially provides more carrots to the defender of a particular policy which is not in favour of the challenger, but at a later stage; the challenger is at will to use sticks as deterrence on certain policy issues. This view puts the defender at the mercy of the challenger in that carrots could be withdrawn at will when the defender of policy is not in compliance. Regardless of the school of thought one considers appropriate, the bottom line is that issue linkage is still relevant approach in solving some contentious policy issues amongst actors in the anarchic international system of self-help. In International Relations, much focus on use of issue linkage has been put on matters surrounding economic interdependence and regional integration. There is general understanding and recognition that economic interdependence and regional integration significantly spills-over to security matters such that instead of nation-states working in isolation, they jointly promote both economic and security development for peace, regional stability and economic development.

3.1 Issue Linkage, Regional Economic Integration and Spill-over Security Functions

Many scholars have examined the application of issue linkage on regional integration matters. A very classical example of integration which appears to have utilized the theory of issue linkage in its development is the European Union, which started as an economic bloc but now also handles security matters. The following part gives a brief introduction of the development of EU, how it came into being from the original European Coal and Steel Community to European Economic Community and then finally to EU. The important role that theoretical concept of spill-over effect played in the development of the EU as both an economic and political body will be examined critically. The concept of spill-over refers to a situation in which a given action related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be obscured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and need for a more action [13]. This concept was used to study and explain how the European Economic Community was established in 1958 [14]. Finn and Lindberg indicated that

the theories of integration and spill-over are collectively referred to as neo-functional theories. Therefore, neo-functional theories are concerned with issues of integration of economic policies amongst nation-states and its spill-over on welfare and security matters.

The basic reasoning behind neo-functional theory is that instead of nation-states focus on self-interest and self-help approaches to international relation issues in line with realist perspectives, they should instead opt to focus on advancing and achieving common interests and needs shared by states and non-state actors in the process of global integration [15]. The advancement of common interests and needs mentioned by [15] is what influences states to push for more integration as economic benefits create the collective need to maintain peace and stability. An example of this could be the development of European Economic Commission which was regarded as a spill-over from integration of European Coal and Steel Communities which later led to establishment of the European Union.

3.2 Development Process of the European Union

The development process of EU originated from the integration of European Coal and Steel Community into one economic bloc handling matters of economic interests for the initial twelve countries and now about seventeen sovereign states. The integration was aimed at protecting the economic interests of basically Western European countries. With the signing of treaty of Maastricht in 1992, the bloc thoroughly discussed how to fully integrate economic, political and security matters so as to protect their regional interests [16]. It was through those discussions that led to the establishment of European Economic Community which later transformed into European Union. The economic integration of EU was possible because the member countries wanted to share the economic risks and better allocation of capital and resources [17]. Although the focus had been on regional economic matters, it was difficult at that time to separate security matters from economics, more especially as both Western and Eastern Europe wanted to have guarantee of security as prerequisite for economic success. It is therefore not surprising that the member states of EU also prioritized political and security matters too. It is clear from this that the EU which originally started as an economic bloc has managed to transform into both an

economic and security bloc with a single market, common commercial policy, a single currency and common foreign and security policies. Apart from the EU being regarded as a classical example of spill-over effect of the economic –security issue linkages, the Eurasian Economic Union is yet another example of the institutions whose development follows the same logic of spill-over effect. This organization has been developed under the leadership of Russia with initial concerns focused on economic and commercial matters. Currently, it looks seemingly clear that the EEU will or has already started considering handling matters of politics and security in Eurasian region.

3.3 Why interests in economic and security matters

In the contemporary world, we have seen nation-states increasingly becoming more interested not only in issues of economic development, but also political and security matters. This interest could be explained by the theory of economic interdependence as developed by Keohane. The concept of economic interdependence as highlighted and developed by Joseph Nye and Keohane significantly states that it is realistically possible for two or more states to jointly avoid serious conflicts and tensions arising from security and political matters on account that the economies of the nation-states could be so interdependent such that it could be in the interests of all parties to promote regional peace, stability and economic development [18]. Nye and Keohane argued that in such a particular case, economic issues could be linked to security and political matters for the sake of advancing common interests. The question that very often is asked in relation to this logic is whether there are any classical examples of issues linkage in international relations which have proved to be effective in solving or reducing conflicts amongst states? In the contemporary world of interdependence, there are indeed various classical examples on how issue linkage has been applied to demand concessions on some policy matters. For example, the United States is seemingly regarded as the first country to have used issue linkage when it popularized its usage during the cold war period by linking security matters with trade issues [19]. The common understanding at that time was that security partners facing common threats naturally eased the way of trading amongst themselves with such linkage systematically promoting common development of trust. It was therefore not surprising that the United States was trading more with Western European Countries and other states which

supported capitalism while the Soviet Union was aligned with those countries that were supporting socialism. From this, it would be argued that the U.S effectively linked security policy with trade policy.

Similarly, author [20] also indicated that President Howard of Australia successfully used and applied issue linkage when the U.S wanted his support to fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. In trying to get some concessions out of the U.S, Australia demanded during the bilateral trade negotiations that the U.S should remove some barriers to trading between them and the United States easily agreed. The importance of employing issue linkage was also pointed out as a strategy of influencing perceived political and security adversaries to achieve a common goal and benefits when [21] indicated that China seemingly appeared to have successfully used security threat in 2008 against Japan over Senkaku / Diaoyu islands to extra more concessions on signing joint gas and oil exploration deals in waters surrounding the islands. Based on this, it becomes increasingly convincing that China effectively linked security policy with Economic policy. All these examples strongly indicate that issue linkage is very often used as mechanism of negotiating for extraction of mutual benefits out of policies amongst states. Based on the foregoing discussions, it is increasingly possible for countries or great powers to use certain economic development policies and frameworks to reduce territorial disputes and conflicts amongst claimants over certain territories under disputes. The task at hand now in this paper is to examine whether issue linkage in the MSR could be used as mechanism of reducing and solving security dilemma arising from territorial disputes between China and ASEAN countries in South China Sea.

4. Issue Linkage Theory and the Significance of MSR

Following the observation by Chinese Government that the Asian economies were generally undergoing difficulties and consequently becoming sluggish at a time when the global trade was contracting and regional economic growth facing challenges of severe financial and economic shocks, President Xi Jinping thought through and decided that the New Asian future required not only the regional development framework but inter-continental strategy to realize the new vision of integrated, coordinated and collaborated economic growth. To this effect, One Belt One Road (OBOR) was conceptualized and developed. OBOR has got two parts, the MSR

and the Silk Economic Belt. In this paper we focus our discussion on the MSR and issue linkage in solving conflict and tensions in SCS. Many scholars have examined the MSR initiative from various perspectives which includes economic, political, security and geopolitical dimensions. According to [22], the MSR is defined as a development policy framework initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping to stimulate sustained Chinese economic growth and development of economies of its strategic partners along the Road. This definition is in line with the thoughts of author [23] who considered it as a good inter-continental economic development strategy aimed at stimulating regional and global economic growth. Since the same author raised aspects of regional and global economic growth in his definition, then it is not surprising to see other parties in the Southeast Asian region perceiving the MSR as a Chinese Geopolitical Strategy of the 21st Century aimed at promoting its integration into the world economy through trade, overseas investment, infrastructure development, connectivity and other development projects in Infrastructure, Communication and Technology [24]. Although there are these misperceptions, we shouldn't lose focus and confidence on what the initiative is trying to achieve in the field of economic growth, because in this era of globalized economy; no one economy can stand alone without easily collapsing. While another scholar thinks that the initiative could be a strategy to pacify Chinese neighbours and promote security in the Southeast Asia region [25], it would seem that Yale was focusing much on the logic of economic liberalism which basically recognises benefits among states engaged in economic interdependence while promoting policies that could diminish security dilemma. The MSR is expected to promote orderly and free flow allocation of resources and deep integration of markets. Because issues of market integration requires joint efforts to open up trade corridors and promote economic growth, it becomes significantly essential for all players along the Maritime Silk Road to effectively participate in the construction of the Road. Therefore, the initiative will encourage regional and global players along the Maritime Silk Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out in-depth regional cooperative initiatives of higher standards [26]. The integration of the markets and anticipated high levels of economic interdependence and regional cooperation will in the long run advance issues of regional peace and stability. The MSR is also aimed at jointly building smooth, secure efficient transport routes; connect major seaports along the belt. It will focus on connectivity and cooperation, peace and development. It seems clear from these that the MSR is an economic

development concept which could have some security spill-over effects. While these perceived benefits could be good for all parties, it could be naïve to ignore the political and security dimensions of the initiative to exacerbate the challenge of security dilemma. Implementers of the initiative should take heed of the warning that [27] put forward when he said “*constructing seaports in a geopolitical zones might increase tensions in an already tense region if not handled well*”. We will now explore how geopolitical issues in the implementation of the MSR initiative could be handled effectively.

4.1 Specific Significance of the MSR to China and ASEAN

The Map below highlights the areas through which the MSR will be implemented in South China Sea. It is an area that is contentious from the perspectives of geopolitics, politics and security matters. Therefore, the specific benefits of the MSR will be examined based on the nature of the geopolitical and security issues in the area.

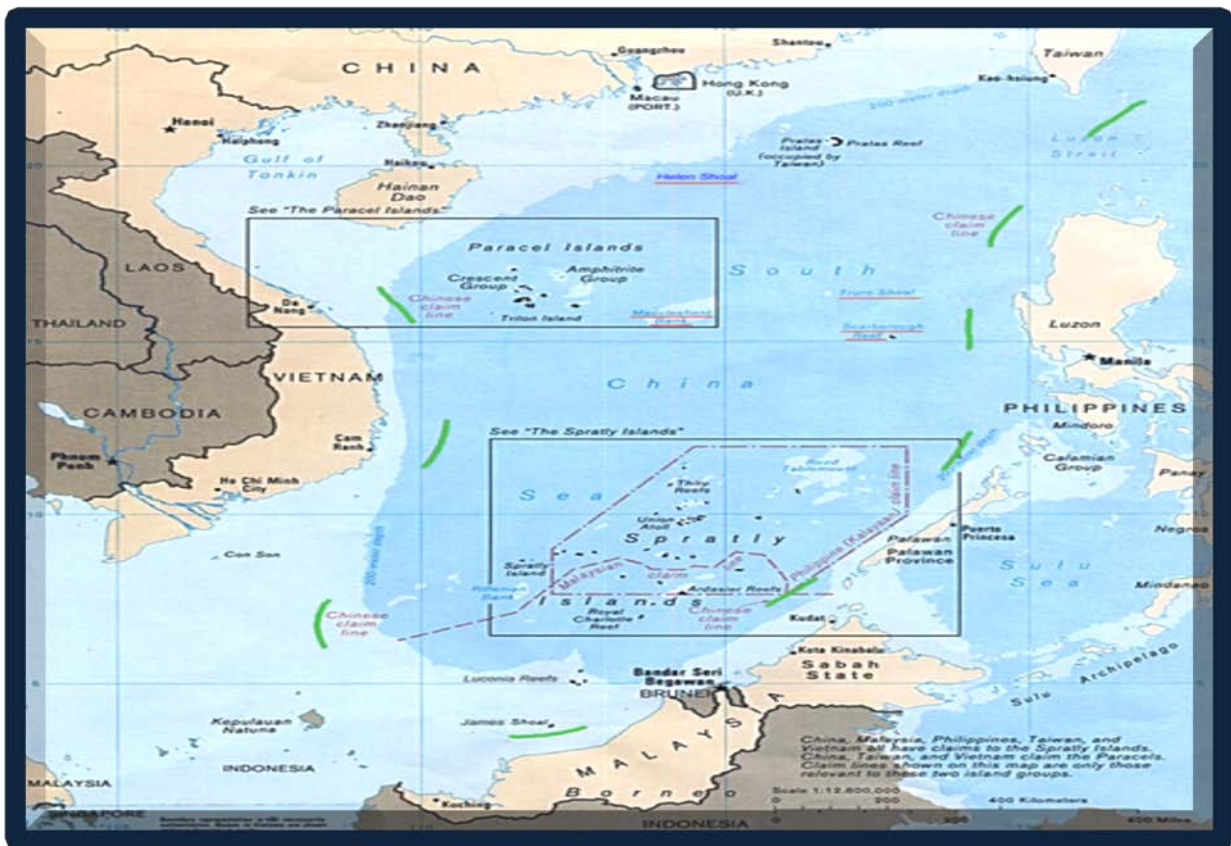


Figure 1

4.2 Schools of Thoughts on Significance of Maritime Silk Road

There are three major schools of thought emerging in relation to the specific significances of the Maritime Silk Road to both China and ASEAN countries. The significance of the initiative is infused in the economic, strategic and political issues of Southeast Asian Region. The first school of thought was put forward by [29] when he linked the stagnation of Chinese economy in 2012/2013 with the urgent need to revisit the Chinese economic growth strategy if China were to sustain the economic growth and benefits it has accrued over the previous three decades. According to this school of thought, the major focus of China is to accelerate economic transformation by enhancing and expanding the global presence and strength of Chinese companies amid economic global recovery. The reasoning behind this is that the “Chinese going global strategy” will absorb the emerging domestic pressure on government to urgently adopt and implement the strategy. The “going global” strategy is underpinned by China’s outward Foreign Direct Investment which was increasing at a compound annual growth rate of 16% while the global foreign direct investment flow declined by 8% annual rate over the same period of 2011 to 2014 [30]. Linking this school of thought to the MSR, there is a general consensus that the initiative will strive to promote maritime cooperation, establish free trade areas, push forward Pan-Asian Port construction projects, interconnect trade routes and promote economic interdependence and regional cooperation. Through these initiatives, it is believed that more business opportunities could be created for Chinese Companies to invest their capital in infrastructure development projects under the initiative. Therefore, the significance of this initiative on the part of China could not be overemphasized as it will indeed stimulate and expand economic opportunities for Chinese companies. An extension to this first school of thought is that not only China is positioned to accrue economic benefits out of the initiative, but ASEAN countries too. This understanding is based on the fact that ASEAN’s development agenda is to build a community of common interests with major focus on promoting realization of common destiny in areas of fostering regional peace and security [31]. The MSR offers an opportunity to realize this dream by enhancing the supply of economic goods and services along the road. Its major focus will be on economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and establishment of free trade areas, connectivity and regional integration initiatives. These aspects are considered very critical in the

implementation of the initiative such that both China and ASEAN countries would benefit from. The establishment of ASEAN was necessitated by the political-security environment in South East Asia in the 1960s and 1970s which led to the significant desire to cooperate for achieving regional peace and security at the time when there were a lot of territorial disputes emerging at that time. The development initiatives of regional economic integration and cooperation were meant to build confidence and trust amongst ASEAN countries to implement economic development projects through peaceful, collaborative, coordinated development path. In fact, ASEAN countries believe that regional economic engagement is a significant core mechanism of achieving sustainable security strategy in the region. Over the years, ASEAN countries have lacked adequate financial resources to finance projects under One Community, One Destiny initiative. The MSR through Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank offers an opportunity to them to borrow infrastructure development funds and finance massive Maritime Infrastructure related projects. It is believed that this will unlock the infrastructure barriers to trade and economic connectivity. The promotion of economic interdependence and connectivity will enhance and boost trade and commerce within the region, thereby allowing ASEAN countries access huge China market [32, 33], while at the same time attracting Chinese investment. Many scholars think that the attraction of Chinese investment into ASEAN countries will contribute towards the realization of the ASEAN's vision of one community, common economic growth, security and peaceful destiny.

4.3 Regional Trade and Investment Patterns between China and ASEAN

One of the critical aspect of the MSR has been the mutual desire to sign Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) between China and ASEAN countries so that both could reap the benefits of trade and investment enhancement coming as a result of the implementation of the initiatives. The FTAs are meant to strengthen closer ties and this has significantly opened up new opportunities for trade and investment [34]. The FTAs have acted as mechanism of removing and eliminating import-export tariffs and other trade barriers on at most 90% of all products traded between the two parties [35]. Ever since the MSR and Economic Belt initiatives were launched by President Xi in 2013, and with the signing of its associated FTAs between China and ASEAN, there has been overwhelming evidence that trade and investment volume between the two sides have been increasing.

According to [35] the bilateral trade between ASEAN and China reached US\$480bn in 2014, one year after launching the MSR and Economic Belt initiative. This figure was an increase of trade volume by 8.3% from the previous year. It was also a six-fold growth of trade volume between the two from US\$78.0bn in 2003. China Briefing also projected in 2014 that Sino-ASEAN trade volume would likely reach US\$500bn by end of 2015. This projected increase in trade was so significant that compared with other years, one would attribute the tangible increase to the contribution that signing of FTAs were making on positively impacting on total trade volume [36]. Comparing the total trade volume of US\$480bn in 2014 to US\$443.6bn in 2013, it would seem that generally there has been an increase in trade between China and ASEAN and this is despite the fact that the tensions over South China Sea had the potential to impact negatively on the relations. As we have noticed that the economic cooperation has been further strengthened and enhanced during the period 2013-2015, we can easily infer that the significant growth in trade and investment being witnessed could be as a result of the MSTR and Economic Belt initiative. The increase in trade volume not only is manifested in the trade relations between China and ASEAN, but also between China and member countries of ASEAN. For example, it has been highlighted that trade between China and Thailand expanded to US\$63.6bn in 2014 from the previous year representing percentage increase of 39%, the investment between the two sides of US\$23bn was to be focused on developing projects that could connect two high speed railways with China rail network by 2021 thereby smoothening the means of doing trade between the parties [37]. This is a significant amount of investment that could not only strengthen the economic ties, but also in the longer term positively impact on people-to-people relations, promote mutual understanding and encourage solving any misunderstanding that could emerge between the two in the course of doing business. The Sino-Philippines trade increase is quite interesting coming up at the time when there have been territorial disputes between the two sides. China Briefing indicated that the trade volume reached US\$14.6 bn in 2013 from 12.84bn in 2012. This increase of about US\$1.7bn coming at a time when the territorial disputes were high clearly indicates that both sides value the strengthening of economic ties while solving the territorial disputes amicably. I therefore argue that economic ties and any other discussion related to strengthening of the ties could indirectly create room for mutual understanding of the real intentions and motives by China to develop and launch the MSR, this could remove any misperceptions and

miscalculations and instead provide more room for interface and resolving of the dispute in peaceful manner. It is also reported by China Briefing that there has been general increase in trade between China and ASEAN countries during the period 2013-2014 as follows: Sino-Laos trade increased by 31.87%, Sino-Vietnamise trade increased by 27.5% while that of Sino- Singapore gradually increased by 4.92%. All these statistics reveal the extent to which China has prioritized strengthening economic relations through MSR and Economic Belt as mechanism of enhancing bilateral relations. The second school of thought was ably explained by [38] in his article published in The diplomat Magazine titled "The China's One Belt, One Road: where to?" when he explained that the initiative has got strategic implications in its design. According to him, China is geographically surrounded by tough neighbourhood which include countries like Japan, Russia, India, Australia and ASEAN countries which pose existential political and security challenges to its strategic interests and survival. The situation is complicated by the emerging geopolitical positioning of the U.S. in Asia -Pacific region following its crafting of Asia -pivot and Rebalancing Strategies. The U.S. Asia-Pivot strategy is believed to be a USA strategy of containing and curtailing Chinese military and economic expansion. Against this background, the MSR is seen as a defensive geo-strategy of China to circumvent any containment or encirclement initiative that regional hostile powers in concert with the U.S. would want to undertake to harm China's national and geopolitical interests. Another angle to the geostrategic dimension of initiative is based on understanding that the construction of seaports under the initiative will assist in diversifying the routes through which China secures the strategic transportation of oil and gas to sustain its economy. Therefore this is very strategic as it would multiply the routes through which oil is delivered to China. The multiplication of the transportation routes will in the long run spread the risks of accessing oil and gas thereby reducing China's economic vulnerabilities [39]. The reduction in Chinese vulnerabilities related to accessing oil will imply that the Chinese economic engine is continuously kept running to sustain economic growth. Politically, the initiative would promote strengthening of bilateral and multilateral relations among players. This would greatly assist China to leverage its soft power diplomacy over ASEAN countries so that they fully support implementation of the initiative in a geopolitical tough terrain of South China Sea. By strengthening bilateral relations between China and ASEAN, there is high chance of China attracting ASEAN countries into its orbit and zone of

influence thereby increasing mutual trust and eliminating animosity towards each other. The last school of thought is related to the principle of common security states. This principle contends that international and regional security is best guaranteed when it rests upon the reciprocal relationship between states rather mutual fear and that common security should always be pursued through cooperative mechanisms with those states that might or be perceived as potential threats [40]. This scholar asserts that International and common Security implies that states cannot achieve regional security in geopolitical contentious zones at each other's expense. This logic demands that there should be high levels of cooperative efforts towards solving security dilemma if states were to achieve common security and peace. The most fundamental principle on the attainment of common security through mutual cooperative efforts hinges heavily on collective efforts to promote economic interdependence and trust. Both China and ASEAN countries value the importance of promoting economic interdependence in the region. It therefore becomes necessary to have a look at how economic interdependence (economic liberalism) could assist in pushing forward issues of strategic mutual economic cooperation as a solution to serious security dilemma. But before doing that, suffice to examine the misperceptions and mistrust that is associated with this initiative and how those could be eliminated for effective implementation of the initiative.

4.4 Misperceptions and Mistrust in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

Despite all the expected benefits of the MSR explained above, why are there still high levels of misperception, suspicion and mistrust on the Chinese initiative of constructing the MSR? Why are these (mis)perceptions developing into serious security dilemma in South China Sea? What can China do to curtail such a development for effective implementation of the initiative? To effectively respond to these sorts of questions, it is logical to understand and examine the misperceptions and mistrust of the initiative as a by-product of geopolitical game in the South China Sea which unfortunately is exacerbating the security dilemma in Asia-Pacific region. The examination will argue that instead of only looking at the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road as a geo-strategy, it is better to take it as an economic development opportunity for both China and ASEAN as it could help in building confidence and trust amongst players. We will argue this, from the theoretical perspective of issue

linkage.

4.5 The Geopolitical misperception of MSR

The MSR has been designed to essentially connect Chinese ports in South China Sea to other maritime ports in South Pacific Sea region, Indian Sea, Middle East, Red Sea in East Africa, gulf of Aden and Mediterranean Sea so as to connect all Eastern Asia region with all other regions in South Asia, Middle East and East Africa through maritime development. Its main aim is to promote regional cooperation, economic interdependence, and inter-trade and infrastructure development through maritime security development. The South China Sea, one of the targeted areas for implementation of the initiative is a region where China has got territorial and sovereignty disputes with Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. The United States also has got geopolitical interests in the same region, especially in relation to its Trans-Pacific Partnership and Asia – Pacific Rebalancing Strategy. The geographical nature of the initiative to include big and contentious South China Sea as target area of project implementation has led to the emerging thinking that the MSR has got geopolitical implications. It therefore becomes necessary to understand how geopolitics has contributed to the security dilemma in South China Sea between China, ASEAN and other big powers like the U.S. We will endeavour to explain how issues of geopolitics could challenge effective implementation of the initiative and what approach could be used to minimize misunderstanding and misperceptions of the initiative. In every geopolitical game, there are actors who are directly or indirectly concerned with the state of affairs at play. If issues of geopolitics and geo-strategy are not handled properly, it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve the objectives for which the geo-strategy was developed. This is because the chances of the situation developing into high levels of security dilemma would become very high. The interaction of China and ASEAN in the South China Sea reveals that the key regional players of the geopolitical game are China, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the U.S. There are also some other interested players like Japan, India and Australia who are indirectly interested in the geopolitics of South China Sea. All these players have got their own reasons to engage in the geopolitical game. So what are the geo-political interests of these players in SCS? Generally, China is interested in territorial and sovereignty issues in the South China Sea. Considering that the Sea is also critical to the transportation of trade

goods, it has become paramount for China to advance issues of regional peace and stability in the region. The question of South China Sea containing a lot of hydrocarbons for gas and oil has increased the contest for the ownership of the sea. It is believed that South China Sea contains 28 bn barrels of possible oil reserves out of which 8 bn barrels are proven oil reserves [41]. The scholar also indicated in his paper titled “the South China Sea Security Dilemma” that the Sea of South China contains 266 cubic feet of gas, an amount of gas that could drive the economic growth of China for a number of years. These statistics seemingly justify the serious geo-economic interests of China to claim for big portions of territory in the South China Sea. Security matters are also of paramount importance to the Chinese Government at a time when the U.S. military is positioning itself in the South China Sea in line with the logic of Strategic Asia-Pacific Rebalancing otherwise also popularly known as Asia pivot. In response to what China thinks is the USA militarization process of the South China Sea, Chinese Government through its military has intensified military modernization program aimed at upgrading its defense capability in the sea. Recently, China has started constructing the artificial security islands and airfields on the South China Sea islands. Its land reclamation is on the increase such that even countries in ASEAN have raised their objections against that. The Chinese expanding presence near Scarborough Shoal has exacerbated the tension between China and the Philippines while at the same time Vietnam is not happy with Chinese posturing near its perceived islands. On the other hand both the US and ASEAN countries have accused China of trying to militarize the South China Sea by showing strong interests of establishing air defense zones in the contested region. China has vehemently denied this by emphasizing that it has got every right to build within its own territory and that the islands being constructed will be used for humanitarian purposes [42]. The more China is constructing military facilities on the Sea Islands the more there is reciprocal reaction from ASEAN and the US resulting in serious security dilemma. Currently, it has been reported that Philippines has signed a pact with the USA that specifies military bases where US forces will be allowed to operate from. Through the same pact, the US has been given permission to construct military facilities and conduct supply missions on the Philippine land. This current situation is so serious that it is escalating tensions in the sea. The US has always argued that there should be free navigation in the South China Sea especially considering that nearly \$US5 Trillion in trade passes annually through this sea. In countering this argument, China has denied that it wants to

block free navigation of trade goods as it has never blocked any ship movement in the sea. It would seem that the concept of free navigation that the U.S. advances as its reason of positioning itself in the South China Sea is an extension of Theodore Roosevelt Geo-political Foreign Policy which focused on the need to “*pursue geopolitical interests and considerations so as to maintain peace by guaranteeing equilibrium in Eurasia and Eastern Asia while tilting the balance against any power threatening to dominate a strategic region*” [43]. True to Kissinger’s views, the U.S. desire to pursue geopolitical interests and tilt the balance against any power threatening its global political, economic and security dominance is significantly reflected and manifested in its geopolitical games with China as it has established strategic regional alliances with countries like Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, India, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Australia (See the Figure below). These strategic alliances are seemingly interpreted by China as approaches aimed at isolating, containing, encircling and suffocating Chinese Expansion and Economic Growth so that it doesn’t become a regional economic and security power.

ASEAN’s request for security support from the US is aimed at counterbalancing Chinese expansion initiatives in the region. However, it is still a fact that while the US is the security centre of influence, China still remains the economic centre of influence in the region. This situation demands careful balancing of economic and security needs in the implementation of the MSR.

5. Balancing Economic and Security issues in MSR through Issue Linkage

Having explained in detail the development framework of MSR and issue linkage theory, we now turn our attention to how issues in the MSR could be used as a strategy of solving security dilemma of territorial disputes in the sea. Security dilemma refers to the spiral model of conflict which normally happens in the theatre of contested geopolitical zones [44], where there is a rising regional great power (both economically and militarily) which appears or is perceived to threaten the existence and security of smaller states through its behaviour and strategic positioning. In trying to counterbalance the perceived threat, the smaller states normally seeks refuge in the protection of their interests by bringing in other dominant great powers to provide security assurance. In the

case of the current situation in South China Sea, China is a rising great power, while ASEAN countries are smaller states which have avoided to bandwagon with China by inclining themselves with the U.S. for security protection against perceived Chinese security threat. In line with the Monroe doctrine, the US has welcomed the invitation by ASEAN so as to achieve its strategic objective of checking on potential rising economic and military powers [45]. In fact, the United States normally enters into strategic military alliance with other states that are seriously threatened by rising great powers with the hope that the allies would provide assurance on containing or limiting expansion of these powers while it provides security guarantee. This is quite true as the U.S has formed military alliances with most of ASEAN countries. The United State formation of alliances with countries such as South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia is aimed at curtailing the expansion of a developing and rising China and this has been significantly feasible with the strengthening of treaty alliances within the region and to expand cooperation so as to ensure its ability to access and operate within the region [46, 47]. The U.S. stance over territory disputes has been that territory claims should be pursued in accordance with UNCLOS and Land features which is an argument that undermines the Chinese claim (the Chinese ownership claim is based on history and rights of first discovery rather than a legal extension of land features), furthermore the United States has also encouraged a multilateral approach to the issue in contrast to China's pursuit of bilateral discussion [48]. The Map of USA Strategic Alliance below captures exactly how China seems to be contained, encircled and isolated by the U.S. military allies in the Southeast Asian region. The issue at hand is the fight to control the South and East China seas, some of the highly contested seas in the region which has necessitated the eruption of strategic security dilemma between China and ASEAN countries.

In response to this containment and encirclement, it would seemingly appear that China recently started constructing military facilities on the islands of South China Sea, and continue reclaiming Sea Islands and building airstrips capable of accommodating wide airplanes. While ASEAN and U.S. have interpreted this as aggressive and offensive geopolitical games, China has justified such moves as defensive mechanisms in light of US expanding military orientation in the sea. In the Chinese understanding of this new military development, they call it defensive realism which has been induced by US establishment of strategic military alliance as

highlighted above. It is this development that has unfortunately resulted into serious security dilemma.

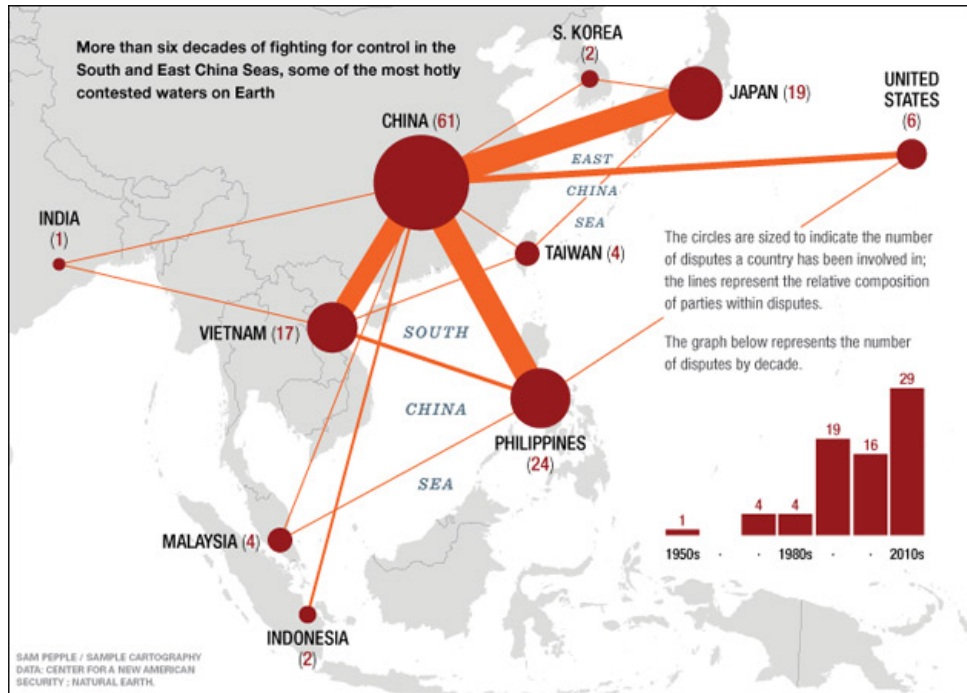


Figure 2

5.1 The Escalation of Security Dilemma Based on Uncertainty and Miscalculations of Security Developments

But before any security dilemma develops, there is substantial amount of uncertainty in international human affairs. States usually fail to interpret properly the motives, intentions and capabilities of other states and how to rationally respond to perceived security threats. It is this uncertainty in the human affairs that triggers states to provide for their own security, ultimately with military force because in a world of interstate anarchy, the world is perpetually in the “state of war”, [49]. Based on this understanding and the logic of realism, it would seem that states place substantial amount of priority on the promotion of self-help approach towards one’s own security development; hence Chinese defensive mechanisms in South China Sea. The interpretation of this is that inter-state anarchy signifies a world of uncertainty, weapons and fear. It is therefore not surprising to see countries like Philippines, Vietnam, USA and China building their military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific because they have to be prepared for any eventuality. The unfortunate part of the security dilemma is that it renders the geopolitical region to be in a perpetual state of uncertainty, tensions and conflicts which if not

handled properly can erupt into war. But can Security dilemma be reduced or solved in South China Sea? This paper argues that this could be minimized, reduced and solved through the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and we will explain and analyse this from the theoretical perspective of issue linkage theory.

5.2 Economic Liberalism, Issue Linkage and the MSR

The basic idea of MSR is to promote the supply of economic public goods for the benefit of all countries along the Road. Its focus is to develop connectivity amongst China and ASEAN countries so as to realize the vision of effectively supplying the economic public goods. The connectivity is defined in terms of infrastructure development, opening up of trade routes, regional integration and economic interdependence. All these critical aspects of the MSR are related to the theory of economic liberalism. The theory of liberalism contends that although the international system is anarchical in structure, this is just a partial truth because ideas and norms lead to formation of society of states and institutions which meditate over the security dilemma and eventually eliminates or decreases the significance of states to follow military path at the expense of peace. The other basic assumption for liberalism is the argument that the core of international relation is not only security concerns but more than that since states are not the only actors in the international system [50]. If states under liberalism can form states of societies, what it implies is that states can depend on one another and work together more effectively through strategic cooperation for peace and survival. If a state doesn't want to go into strategic cooperation around issues of economic interdependence, the theory of liberalism contends that other non-state actors can influence government to follow that path. To this effect, China could be more of a strategic partner in promoting regional integration and economic interdependence through MSR. This is particularly true if one considers the fact that President Xi Jinping conducted state visits to countries under the two Roads to sell and garner support for effective implementation of OBOR. This behaviour is in line with the liberal thought of addressing issues and problems of achieving lasting peace and cooperation in the international relation [51]. However, we have to recognize that the implementation of New Maritime Silk Road is very political to implement. The United States is particularly concerned with issues of freedom of navigation, political and

economic influence, peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. The other countries are interested on issues of access to oil and gas resources in the South China Sea, national security and economic growth. While it appears that the US provides security assurance for these countries and hence has got political influence in balancing the political ambitions of China, on the other hand China's economic growth over the years could be an inducements for countries in the region to cooperate with it for the development of their economies and promotion of peace and security. While possibilities of tensions and conflicts could be there, we project a picture of more economic cooperation and economic interdependence initiatives outweighing the political aspects. This projected political picture puts forward an argument that the economic and diplomatic benefits through the construction of MSR could assist in solving the security issues. Above all, interaction of states through cooperative and collaborated development initiatives could assist in developing shared values and identity, build trust and in the long run induce countries to promote each other's' interests and values.

5.3 The possible Spill-over Effect of MSR

The implementation of MSR is expected to bring in economic and commercial benefits amongst actors involved in the implementation of the initiative. But as [52] already indicated that “ *spill-over refers to the situation in which a given action related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal is only assured only by taking further actions, which in turn creates more need for further conditions and actions*”, it would be logical to expect spill-over effect of MSR developing into political and security benefits. This is particularly true when one considers the argument of Joseph Nye when he viewed international engagement amongst states from the lens of complex interdependence, a situation in which economic, political, cultural, social and security aspects could develop simultaneously amongst interacting nation-states. Nye argued that because of the economic interaction and strong levels of economic interdependence, it would be in the interest of all actors to prioritize peace and regional stability if they were to continue achieve high levels of economic growth and development. For instance, the development of European Union can be traced to the initial integration of the coal and steel communities; which at that time prioritised the handling issues of economic development through regional institutions called European Economic Commission [EEC] in Europe. The EEC later developed into

European Union; an institution that is currently handling both economic and political issues and challenges facing the member states. From this, we can see that it is possible that an institution that has been handling economic matters can evolve into a political and economic body. Another example of an institution whose original purpose was based on handling economic matters but later changed to handle both economic and security issues is the Eurasian Economic Union [EEU]. The EEU was developed from the evolving of Eurasian Economic Community, a regional body that was focused on economic integration of its member states between 2000 and 2014 [53]. Through EEC, the focus was to establish common economic space for achieving four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services and people) within the Eurasian region. Having realized the benefits coming from the establishment of economic space, the EEC was terminated in 2015 and in its place, Eurasian Economic Union was created. It is this new organization (EEU) that now took upon itself to start handling both economic and security matters within the region. The foregoing benchmarks provide us with clear understanding that initiatives like the Maritime Silk Road which is typically oriented towards addressing economic issues could as well gradually evolve into a body that would handle economic, political and security issues in line with the logic of the theory of spill - over effect. Therefore, one would argue that the economic benefits accrued from MSR could have security and political spill-over function thereby necessitating interested countries positioning themselves to jointly handle economic, political and security dilemma issues consciously with much focus oriented on preserving economic ties as precondition for continued supply of economic public goods. Considering this line of reasoning, one would anticipate that China and ASEAN countries would be persuaded by levels of economic benefits accrued from MSR to rationally link economic policies with both political and security policies so that there is symmetry in the security and political issues in their respective policies. It is this symmetry in policies and decision-making processes that could develop into common understanding, building confidence and trust amongst the players and in the long run, reduce cases of serious security dilemma in SCS.

But realization of this will hinge highly on the conscious diplomatic initiatives and quality of discussion on regional integration and cooperation with key partners, the United States inclusive.

6. Suggestions and Recommendation

So far, it has been argued that security dilemma develops when Nation-States usually fail to interpret properly the motives, intentions and capabilities of other states and how to rationally respond to perceived security threats. It has been asserted that it is this uncertainty in the human affairs that triggers states to provide for their own security, ultimately with military force because in a world of interstate anarchy, the world is perpetually in the “state of war” [54]. We also argued that issue linkage in MSR provides an opportunity for states involved in the implementation of the initiative to supply economic public goods and services to its people and that sometimes economic benefits could outweigh the security benefits or it could also be possible for economic benefits to spill-over into security and political benefits. In line with this, the question that comes is that how can issue linkage in MSR be used to solve security dilemma of territorial disputes? This section will now address this area so as to justify that issue linkage in the MSR is indeed an opportunity of solving security dilemma. The following are suggested recommendations which could possibly yield positive results in terms of MSR solving territorial disputes through issue linkage:

6.1 Different tactics of engagement by China with different ASEAN Countries and the U.S

China has always advocated for pursuance of bilateral discussions with each member of ASEAN in solving issues of territorial disputes. While the U.S, which is a security ally of ASEAN has preferred multilateral approaches to solving the disputes, it would seem that this is not entirely preferred option by all ASEAN countries as some countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand have argued that they do not have territorial disputes with China. This renders the whole idea of using multilateral approaches to solving the dispute unrealistic and problematic. It therefore becomes significantly necessary for China to use different tactics with different ASEAN countries with all tactics grounded in bilateral negotiations. The advantage of bilateral engagement is that issues under discussions are not necessarily politicized; thus creating more room to develop realistic strategies of resolving the disputes through win-win mechanisms and mutual respect. There are very good examples why this approach is good in resolving issues of territorial disputes. For example, China and

Russia resorted to this approach when they had serious issues of territorial disputes in the 1960s. China and India are also currently considering this approach in resolving their territorial boundary issues. This being the case, it would be argued that dispute issues in SCS between China and ASEAN could be best solved by following bilateral mechanisms with each country.

6.2 Building Trust Between China and ASEAN Countries

Trust is very important in any engagement between nation-states if they were to achieve the objectives under which their interaction is pegged. Basically, there are two types of trust which if fully developed could generate confidence of ASEAN in China and these are; function-type trust and Relation-type trust. The Function-type trust hinges heavily on how the countries concerned could function together to implement policies that assures mutual benefits based on win-win collaboration. Even if policies could either be implemented jointly or individually, but no country would be motivated to implement exploitative policies because of the function-trust that has been developed. The relation-Type Trust is based on the relationship that is there between two or more countries. It is subject to geography and regional needs. Under this trust, each geographical region has got its own needs and the members of that particular region strive to achieve the common goals. Because each member of the economic region participates fully in the implementation of actions, relation-type trust is developed which underpins the relational interaction among states. Based on these explanations, we can argue that China should spearhead the development of trust if it were to effectively eliminate any misperceptions and mistrust in the initiative it is promoting.

6.3 Strengthening Cooperation between ASEAN and China

One of the critical areas that could assist in reducing and solving security dilemma in SCS is to strengthen cooperation amongst parties involved in implementation of MSR. China and ASEAN can cooperate jointly in developing sea resources for mutual benefit and win-win collaboration. The economic cooperation could also be extended to security and navigational channel cooperation. The navigational channel security cooperation could be an approach of consolidating joint management of the sea trade routes against pirates and maritime related

crimes targeting global shipping of goods.

6.4 Transparency and Accountability in Constructing the MSR

It is incumbent upon China to promote transparency and accountability in the development and implementation of initiatives under MSR. China needs to engage more with ASEAN on the mechanisms of managing the sea ports and other maritime-based infrastructure which would be developed under the initiative. This would actually continue creating and strengthening the development of confidence and trust between them.

7. Future Projection of International Relations

Although it is very difficult in international relations to predict with high levels of certainty how events could develop in future in light of theoretical and historical perspectives, there is no harm to use theoretical perspectives to predict what the state of international affairs could be in light of current phenomena. Assuming the MSR is successfully implemented, we can predict that China will gradually promote foreign policy of cooperative, coordinated and collaborated economic development. While the economic and cultural power will not necessarily translate into immediate swapping of geopolitical security positions with the United States, but the possibility of China strengthening its cultural and economic relations with ASEAN could be high thereby developing and strengthening its soft power engagement mechanisms with ASEAN. The strong soft power initiatives could induce development of more trust amongst ASEAN towards China, remove misjudgements and miscalculations and in the long run effectively eliminates high tensions and conflicts emerging out of security dilemma over territorial disputes. The MSR will generally strengthen economic and political relations between ASEAN and China while at the same time promoting economic interdependence, regional integration and maintenance of peace and stability across the regions. But it would be very difficult to argue that the MSR will lead to resolving misunderstanding between China and U.S over current Chinese positioning in SCS since the U.S has also got vested interests in the same region. But the two big powers could be motivated to work collaboratively on issues of economic integration and security maintenance in the region. This notwithstanding, any economic enhancement between China and ASEAN could have in the long run political spill-over effect

thereby minimising any misunderstanding and conflicts arising from territorial dispute.

8. Conclusion

This research paper addressed the fundamental question of whether the Chinese led inter-continental development initiative of the MSR is an opportunity to reduce and solve the security dilemma of territorial disputes in South China Sea between China on one hand and ASEAN countries and the USA on the other. The paper addressed this fundamental research question from the theoretical perspectives of issue linkage in the MSR. Using these relevant theoretical perspectives and other concepts in International Relations, the paper has argued that the intentions of China in conceptualising the MSR is in good faith especially in areas of stimulating economic growth, promoting regional integration and cooperation, connectivity and infrastructure development across the Southeast Asian region. These economic and political benefits could outweigh the benefits of geopolitical contests thereby assisting in solving the security dilemma of territorial issues in the sea. The paper also argued that the best effective implementation of the initiative could be to link security issues to economic benefits out of the Maritime Silk Road through understanding these issues from the theoretical perspective of issue linkage. It has been shown that cooperative and collaborated and integrated economic development could build trust, remove animosity between states and create shared values and identity towards achieving common security. Lastly, the paper has argued that successful implementation of the initiative requires high levels of diplomacy, cooperation and strengthening bilateral relations in areas of economic, political, cultural development and geopolitics since the project is intercontinental in nature. It is therefore incumbent upon China to see to it that it strengthens the soft power while minimising the hard power, rekindle the friendly relations with ASEAN and demonstrate that through Maritime Silk Road, China could be trusted as a reliable strategic partner for attaining peace, stability and security in the region. If this could be demonstrated, there are high chances that the current security dilemma could be minimized and eventually eliminated as all parties would be concerned with addressing common challenges of sluggish economies, declining trade and collaborated and integrated economic growth and regional connectivity.

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