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China and the United States face hard choices in their policy options in the wake of The Hague International Arbitration Tribunal delivering an 'Adverse Ruling' on China's sovereignty claims over South China Sea.

Global media has widely covered the verdict given by the Hague Arbitration Tribunal against China's claims to sovereignty enclosing the South China Sea with its highly publicised 'Nine Dash Line'. Hence it is not the intention here to repeat those details but focus on the really "Hard Options" that await China and the United States as they begin to wrestle with the aftermath of the ruling and the regional and global implications that would arise.

With both China and the United States intent on most likely to exercise 'Hard Options', dangers lurk of military miscalculations of others intentions leading to China-US skirmishes, local conflict or in the extreme an all-out war. The last named may be an extreme but when it comes to China nothing can be ruled out when China presently is heavily drunk in the arrogance of its new-found military power.

Since China shows no signs of relenting on its aggression in South China Sea conflicts, the United States in a repeat of history of sixty five years ago should seek United Nations military intervention under a United Nations Command like in the Korean War. Should the United States shirk from seeking UN intervention then the alternative is a full blown conflict in which the United States may have to initially initiate hostilities on its own.

Reverting back to this ruling, it in effect upholds the widely held global and regional perception that China has indulged in blatant aggression against Vietnam and the Philippines. It also upholds the position of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei that China is making false claims on their

respective maritime domains in the South China Sea.

China has polarised the Asia Pacific against itself because of its relentless aggression against Vietnam and the Philippines and coercive political and military coercion of the worst kind. China's aggression in the South China Sea stands described by a Columnist in a recent post in the South China Morning Post as "Thuggery with a racist tinge".

The United States is the unintended beneficiary of China's conflict escalation because resultantly virtually the whole of Indo Pacific Asia has rallied around the United States and is strongly expecting the United States to checkmate China's conflict escalation in the South China Sea conflicts.

In mid-July 2016 the South China Sea conflicts are not between China and its ASEAN neighbours but stand visibly transformed into a high gamble of global strategic stakes and possibly conflict between China and the United States.

Worth recalling is the reality that since 2012 China's President Xi Jinping in enunciating his grandiose "Chinese Dream" to propel China into a Superpower status had made China's illegal claims to the South China Sea as the centrepiece of this strategy and hyped China's domestic pitch to 'Hypernationalism' levels. China under President Xi has been unduly bellicose and aggressive in escalating conflict in the South China Sea maritime expanse.

China's misperceived invincibility in the South China Sea was fanned by the United States lack of firm action against Chinese aggression against its small neighbours. United States was in a state of denial arising from its "Risk Aversion" fixations. It is only lately that the United States raised the stakes for China by enhanced deployment of US Navy aircraft carriers and combat assets.

Consequently, both China and the United States have no soft options open to them in the wake of The Hague Tribunal's adverse ruling against China. In the wake of this ruling either China or the United States has to blink and climb down from their asserted positions that have surfaced lately.

China has no other option but to continue with its aggressive brinkmanship against Vietnam and the Philippines and now Indonesia added. China can be expected to add artificial islands in the South China Sea and has already deployed combat aircraft and naval ships. China in yet another show of defiance of global opposition can resort to declaring an ADIZ over the South China Sea. Both of the above China's actions will lead to conflict escalation in an already surcharged South China Sea military flashpoint environment.

China will be forced into the above hard options because Chinese domestic political environment would not brook any Chinese climb-down or conciliatory moves in the South China Sea. President Xi's leadership could be politically challenged if he now climbs down in face of global condemnation. A climb -down would be viewed domestically as China's defeat under the leadership of President Xi.

The United States lately has stiffened its stances on the South China Sea confrontation and conflict escalation foisted by China. US Navy has increased the number of Aircraft Carriers and US Navy combatant assets in the South China Sea. United States has also increased its FONOP patrols in vicinity of China-Occupied and China-created artificial islands. The Pentagon is reported to have contingency plans ready for a possible US military intervention in the South China Sea.

Significantly, China's assertion of 12 nautical miles sovereignty around its captured and artificially created islands holds no validity in light of the adverse ruling against China. If that be so then US Navy ships would be entitled to intrude in waters of islands in adverse possession of China.

The United States, even in a presidential election campaign year cannot afford to renege on its alliance commitments to the Philippines and its overall commitment to Asia Pacific security and maintaining regional stability which stands threatened by China's conflict escalation.

Any United States climb-down in face of Chinese conflict escalation in wake of The Hague Tribunal's adverse ruling on China's illegal claims to sovereignty over South China Sea maritime expanse and the islands under its adverse possession would tantamount to United States making an exit from the Western Pacific in face of China's aggression. It would be a day of infamy for the United States to blink now in the South China Sea conflict escalation

In the above strategic scenario a host of regional and global implications arise which need a brief mention. Regionally, China has gravely lost "face" in East Asia and South East Asia. That itself creates complicated scenarios for China's future political and strategic moves in Asia Pacific. ASEAN can no longer afford to be divided by China's machinations and will be expected to take firm stands on China's South China Sea conflict escalation. Should ASEAN fail to do so with some of its members succumbing to Chinese pressures, one can expect ASEAN to unravel?

Regionally, Japan and India as contending powers ranged against China in Asian power calculus need to calibrate more firm stances on South China Sea conflicts. While Japan is actively involved, including joint patrols with the United States, India has hesitated so far in a more explicit display. India needs to recognise that the security of the Indian Ocean lies and is much dependant on China being checkmated in the South China Sea.

In this connection, it needs to be pointed out that to enable the United States to stand upto China's conflict escalation in the South China

Sea, the United States needs to elicit strong support from Japan and India. United States therefore cannot continue with its China Hedging Strategy as that confuses both Japan and India.

At the global level, the most serious implication for the United States and the global community is to face the daunting challenge whether China is equipped politically and morally to be a responsible stakeholder in global security affairs. More importantly, can China be permitted to continue as a UN Security Council Permanent Member when it defies global conventions and indulges in blatant aggression against weaker UN member-states?

The League of Nations unravelled because of its inability to checkmate Nazi Germany's aggression; the United Nations may follow suit if it fails to rally around global support to checkmate China in the South China Sea.

In conclusion, what needs to be emphasised, is that the South China Sea conflict escalation by China is heading towards emerging as a litmus test both regionally and globally. The moot question is that can China be allowed to get away with aggression, brinkmanship and defiance of global conventions to pursue President Xi's "China Dream"? Can China with such questionable credentials be accepted as a responsible stakeholder in global security?

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