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## China's 9-dash line is map without coordinates

BY ELLEN TORDESILLAS

Although the two Chinese speakers in the recent forum on the South China Sea organized by the Carlos P. Romulo Foundation with the Institute of South East Asian Studies, did not specifically mention their country's nine-dash-line map in asserting the supremacy of their claim over the South China Sea, the subject surfaced several times in the discussions.

While the Chinese speakers - Zhang Liangfu, first secretary of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Chen Shiqiu, vice president of China UN Association and China Society of Human Rights Studies - skirted around the nine-dash-line map in asserting China's claim over the South China Sea, parts of which are also being claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei with Taiwan making the same over-encompassing claim as China, other speakers were forthright about their criticism about map submitted by China to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on May 7, 2009.

One speaker during the no-attribution session said the nine-dash line map "can't be justified."

Peter Gailbraith, former US ambassador to Croatia and now head of the Windham Resources Group which provides negotiating and strategic services to government and corporate clients, said China's nine-dash-line "has no basis in international law."

One speaker remarked, the map "doesn't even have coordinates."

All that the map shows are nine dashes or dotted lines (it used to be more than nine) forming a U-shaped line around almost the whole the South China Sea area, which China claims is part of its territory. The area includes the Spratlys group, a cluster of oil-rich islands disputed by five other countries, including the Philippines.



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I asked Chen, who was formerly China's ambassador to Indonesia and former permanent representative and ambassador to the United Nations and other International organizations in Vienna if China would be willing to have the issue of conflicting claims resolved in the International Court of Justice or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, he answered without answering the question, an art which he seems to have mastered.

The motherhood statement about " putting aside the issue of sovereignty over the disputed island and instead embark on joint development" was thrown a lot during the forum.

Someone asked Chen if they are willing to have joint development on Mischief Reef, an island claimed by the Philippines which was occupied by China in 1994. Again, Chen answered without saying anything.

There was a contest among China, Taiwan and Vietnam on the historical basis of their claim which dates to as far back as 16th to 17th centuries.

But one South China Sea expert said historical claims can't be the basis for territorial claims because if that were so Portugal and Spain could re-claim ownership of countries in the world because in 1494 under the Treaty of Tordesillas, they divided all the land on the Earth outside of Europe between the two of them.

Another distinguished speaker was former US Ambassador to the Philippines Frank Wisner, who is now the international affairs advisor of Patton Boggs LLP, a public policy and lobbying firm.

Although Wisner underscored that the views he was articulating were his own, he was echoing statements made by American officials, State Secretary Hillary Clinton and former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Wisner said "The right of free passage and freedom of navigation and the orderly and consensual exploitation of the resources of the South China Sea are matters of huge importance to all nations."

He said "The US is committed to maintaining a robust military presence in Asia and will support its allies. It will maintain capabilities sufficient to deter conflict."

Quoting Gates, he said, "The United States can be counted in the near future to conduct naval port calls, training exercises and help friends address regional challenges."

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