

Track II
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***Issues and Positions on the South
China Sea: An Indian Perspective***

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India

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Format of Presentation

- *Propositions*
- *The Geopolitical frames of South China Sea*
- *Issues of Stability and Convergence*
- *India's Interests and Stakes*

Propositions

- South China Sea is a critical maritime theatre that links the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- Geopolitical fulcrum lies in the extensive offshore mineral and hydrocarbon deposits and the intense trade routes that link the Indian and Pacific Ocean economies;
- Contemporary Geopolitics in the age of globalization is inevitably premised on territorial disputes--sovereignty contestations; disputes over sea-based resources --spiraling into military conflict– identity politics intertwining with foreign policies;
- South China Sea—potential site to resurrect ancient rivalries and contentions superimposing on contemporary fragile interstate diplomacy

The Geopolitical Frames of the South China Sea Issue

The Geopolitics of South China Sea could be constructed from four positions:

- Territory, Nationalism and Sovereignty concerns;
- Power Transition and the dilemmas of security;
- The persistence of asymmetric actors and their challenges;
- Economic interdependence and strategic competition

Territory, Nationalism and Sovereignty concerns

- i) contestations of the overlapping territories and boundaries with the critical salience in the perception that a huge host of resources could be monopolized by the dominant power;
- ii) What is the extent and scope of commercially recoverable resources and the means of sharing them among the claimants;
- iii) complexity of the boundary delimitation is catalyzed by the historical animosities, the prevalent perceptions and misperceptions, the twists and ironies of the domestic politics that regimes play on the dominant actor; *Sovereignty Concerns* and the apprehension of sovereignty violations by contending states both regional and extra-regional is a dominant factor in the region.

Sovereignty concerns are derivative of the historical and colonial factors that have shaped the national identities and resistance to external domination.

The Geopolitical Frames of the South China Sea Issue

- ***Sovereignty Concerns*** and the apprehension of sovereignty violations by contending states both regional and extra-regional is a dominant factor in the region;
- Sovereignty concerns are derivative of the historical and colonial factors that have shaped the national identities and resistance to external domination.;
- Territorial and maritime disputes and contentions over unresolved border and boundary issues are vital points of assertion of national sovereignty;
- South China Sea --source of national identity for China-- “recovery” of the area for the Chinese leaders provides a means to erase a century of national humiliation of colonialism and “unjust treaties”

The Geopolitical Frames of the South China Sea Issue

Power Transition and the dilemmas of security

- SCS could be viewed from the perspective of shifting power postures—relative decline and power rise;
- US realignment of GPR 2004 and increased focus on GWOT; China's CNP rise; 2002 DOC—Southeast Asia's constant 'enmeshment' of China and US in the region;
- Evidence of Power Transition--the assurance of a dominant hegemonic power in a regional and global power overlay'; presence of 'challengers' with equivalent power parity with the dominant power in the regional and global power configurations';
- Power transition --commences with the dissatisfaction of the rising powers towards the dominant overlay of the regional and global hegemon-
- SCS is a case of propensity of the rising powers emerging as 'dissatisfied powers' vowing for a change in the status quo or the rules of the game propels the power transition process.

The persistence of asymmetric actors and their challenges

- Geopolitics of the globalization and the post-globalization period reflect persistence of asymmetric threats of piracy, maritime terrorism and human trafficking;
- Asymmetric threats at sea have a very strong land access and basing of operations;
- Land-based transnational threats of piracy, maritime terrorism and violence at sea exposes the vulnerabilities of the Sea Lanes of Communication to disruption with the mass catastrophic incidents with serious spiral consequences;
- Existing complications on the SLOCs --contest of stakes between with the littoral states like Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines and the international users like Japan, South Korea, India, United States and Australia;
- Economic interdependence and trade is a common and convergent interest of the parties in the dispute. China, Japan, U.S. and India have strong convergence in ensuring joint counter asymmetric operations against maritime threats that endanger energy and trade flows.

Economic interdependence and strategic competition

- SCS is a intertwining between economic cooperation, interdependence and strategic competition;
 - Growing economic and trade interdependence between China and Southeast Asia--witnessed growing integration of the East Asian economies through the aegis of the ARF, EAS and the APEC;
- i) Increased national wealth and the proportionate share of gross national product are driving nations to enhanced military expenditures--spur military modernization. correlation of increased national wealth and military expenditure is lead by China both as proportion of national wealth as well as the rising trends of military modernization;
- ii) uneven economic growth-- with China dominating the economic momentum could lead to bitter trade disputes and thereby it could affect the status quo of the South China Sea issue;

Economic interdependence and strategic competition

- iii) Balancing dynamics in the region are quite evident in the following patterns: smaller states regard the US as a benign offshore power and distrust of Chinese intentions—preference of US as against a potential Chinese threat;

- iv) Is an “Asian-NATO” framework possible in the region ?—collective defence efforts?— would it emerge? Are there parallels from the past in Europe to the region?

The rise of China in its economic and strategic power does warrant a collective regional response from Southeast Asia and other extra-regional actors premised on power transition and offensive realism necessitating the importance of a collective defence initiative;

SCS is a theatre for multilateral competitive regional rivalry with trans-regional implications : contentions of sovereignty, resources competition, implications for sea-lane security, new patterns of maritime access and projection of power and also the potential stoking of a hegemonic war

Issues of Stability and Convergence

- With the growing accents in escalation and tensions, the imperatives for evolving stability based on convergence of interests of littoral and extra-regional states is vital:
 - a) Imperative to emphasize on stabilization of the region due to its critical economic interdependence, exploitation of natural resources in the region and the energy flows through the region;
 - b) Use of force as the means to resolve the resources issues and sovereignty concerns would be perilous;
 - c) Absence of a viable approach to solve the intractable conflicts and prolong the same could drag the region into fresh round of skirmishes;
 - d) Deterrence is critical. Imperative to stabilize deterrence—would be vital in stabilizing the region with Maritime Risk Reduction Measures as well as Confidence Building Mechanisms auguring for better understanding of all the parties of inadvertent escalation of skirmishes.

Issues of Stability and Convergence

- e) Ensuring freedom of navigation, joint maritime scientific research at regional and international fora are inevitable and crucial augmenting joint efforts and contributions of countries region-wide;
- f) Imperative to implement DOC; as it would be a important measure to stabilize the region' while boosting international and trans-regional cooperation on transnational threats and challenges;
- g) Importance of ADMM-Plus as an important platform promoting constructive engagement between ASEAN and its partners on strategic as well as defense and security issues affecting the region.

Issues of Stability and Convergence

- Imperative on conflict avoidance with the specific objectives of reducing the risks of an escalation. Transparency on the levels of military modernization is important;
- Importance to focus and emphasize on the UNCLOS and the institutionalization of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation given that, these are pivotal instruments of the China-Southeast Asia and other external powers;
- Important to have the sovereignty question is frozen until viable joint development measures are proposed and implemented. This could reduce the contentious issues of nationalism and to an extent reduce the geopolitical motives of the conflict.
- China's assertiveness and its "Nine - dot Map" declaration under which China claimed to exercise their jurisdiction over 80% of the South China Sea is **highly destabilizing** and works against any effort to stabilization;

India's Interests and Stakes

- India's interests and stakes in the region have persisted—
Ancient & Contemporary
- The rise of China and the assertive military and strategic modernization overdrive and China's aggressive strategies of attempting to “box” India in South Asia;
- India has credible economic presence in the Russian Far East in Sakhalin with its geo-energy investments. Trade between India and the region and beyond is now a substantial 55% of India's total trade;
- India's naval engagements have steadily increased since 2001 with Southeast Asia in South China Sea and with South Korea, Japan, Russia and the United States in the East Pacific. Anchoring on Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines in Southeast Asia and with Japan, South Korea and Russia in Northeast Asia,

India's Interests and Stakes

- India's position in the region is one of economic engagement and security cooperation. Its engagement in ARF, EAS and the various bilateral engagements with Southeast Asia, China, Japan, South Korea and the United States shapes its role in the region.
- Expanding Indian economic footprint in Northeast Asia is attributed to about 19.25% imports and over 13.75% of India's total trade slice (2008-09).
- India's continued interests would dictate the evolution of a long-term policy of the country in the region:
- A rising China with its impressive offensive military power and the continued robustness of its economy is sharply evident in the face of the relative decline and reluctance of the United States and a reluctant Japan that has been recently imperiled by its own natural crisis

India's Interests and Stakes

- >> India's role as an important stakeholder emerges as quiet and solid actor who would be able deftly combine the synergies of a democratic state with benign interests that are non-intrusive to a sovereignty and identity sensitive Southeast Asia;
- >> India's interest would be augmenting a robust economic role that would be an increasingly an alternate and pole to China;
- >> India offers a vital strategic and geopolitical balance that would be increasingly crucial in the region even as the turbulence of the regional disputes in the South China Sea could be expected to run into uncharted pathways

Final Comments

- Contending geopolitical positions on the South China Sea issue shows that the stakes of an escalating conflict harms the interests of China and the littoral countries of the region as well as the external powers—since economic interdependence is jeopardized;
- Espousal of peaceful conflict-resolving approach provides for a security order that is based on multiple security pathways steering away from either the offensive realist power transition theory oriented conflict;
- Enmeshment of China, US and other states with the regional states alone could stabilize the region and help ameliorate the tensions

Thank You