

# Geo- Politics in South China Sea: A Historical Perspective

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**Abstract:** The water has been depicted “the next oil” for its strategic natural resources availability, reserves oil, and natural Gas. So it has strong influenced on geo-strategies, international politics and global securities. Many scholars articulated, in coming decades, the South China Sea will be central point of conflict in Asia. The U shaped South China Sea among the most critical water political flash zone where several nuclear states compete to hegemony. The South China Sea (SCS) often called second Middle East for its deflagration and disagreement with stakeholder and non-stakeholder states. The power struggle and The American dominance in Southeast Asia in the name of some approaches (Freedom of navigation, pivot to Asia policy and Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into Law) make the situation more challenges and encourage the skirmishes. There are consequently deep-rooted miss-understanding and historical hostility in this region among China and other nations. This paper purposes to deep understand about geo- political phenomenon of South China Sea. This attempts to reveal the interferences of U.S and her allies that’s fuel acute tension in East Asian region. This study also examines how the South China Sea territorial disputes colored into concern matter of international politics

**Keywords:** Geo-politics, Territorial dispute, nine dash Line, Non-Stakeholder states,

## I. INTRODUCTION

History is replete with examples of violent conflicts over water. The hydro-graphical basins which are linked to the greater use of water for power production and related to the greater speed of economic nationalism got an emphasized importance since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1). The experts describe the hydrographical circumstances as a key factor in ‘both national and international politics as a binding link and dividing line in human destiny’. Strategic specialists these days consider conflicts over water are inevitable (2). There is a prevalent doctrine that future war will be occurred over water, not oil.

“Whisky is for drinking, water is for fighting over”  
- Mark Twain

In coming decades, the supply of water will influence diplomacy, geopolitics even wars. It has been said, when there was no access to water, there would be no global peace. Water’s role in shaping politics goes back centuries. “In the ancient world, large bodies of water formed natural

boundaries for people and nations,” says Zenia Tata, executive director of global development and international expansion at XPrize, an organisation that’s holding a worldwide competition for innovative water management solutions. “But today’s geopolitical landscape looks very different,” and access to water remains paramount. According to the Pacific Institute, California-based water resource information non-profit, there have been dozens of water-related conflicts worldwide from 2000BC to present day. In the 21st Century, freshwater supplies are drying up, climate change is raising sea levels and altering borders, explosive population growth is straining world resources, and global hyper-nationalism is testing diplomatic relations. Meanwhile, water demand is expected to go up 55% between 2000 and 2050. In the coming century, in terms of its value as a global resource, it’s been described as “the next oil” (3). The South China Sea disputes involve the interests of the United States, particularly with regard to freedom of navigation, international norms and law, relations with important partners and allies, and the expectation of the peaceful resolution of disputes. China rising power and capabilities make PRC actions more consequential and unsettling than those of others, so they deserve particular attention but need to be evaluated in the broader context of the motives and actions of others as well (4). South China Sea (SCS) may be the most tactically noteworthy water line of the 21st century. The South China Sea is a marginal sea that is part of the Pacific Ocean that extends from The Strait of Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the north east. The claimant states South China Sea is China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The potential for hydrocarbon resources, importance in maritime navigation, significance for international trade and transport security in the sea, as well as strategic interests pertaining to balance of power, are the driving forces that mark the significance of these dynamics. Generally, the South China Sea is rich in resources and holds significant strategic and political importance. In present situation, the South China Sea is like a hot cake in international politics because it has already composed huge political tension with several little clashes with claimant’s state. Disputes among the claimants in the South China Sea go back many decades but have become more visible and intense in the last few year. The

republic of China is a principal state who has demanded most areas of sea and she wants nucleus hegemony on South China Sea. Though, U.S.A and her ally expressed their disagreement with this Chinese demand. But Chinese president xi Jinping said, China strongly belong on “territorial sovereignty and marine rights” It has been seemed; China is not interested to lesson anything regarding this issue from outside of the world. So, political anxiety is escalating day by day in this region (5)

## II. SIGNIFICANCE OF SOUTH CHINA SEA: *ECONOMIES, RESOURCES AND GEOGRAPHICAL*

The South China Sea (SCS) is, however, one of the most dangerous zones in the world today to conflagrate blaze into fracas at the slightest provocation. As a vital artery of trade for many of the world's largest economies, the South China Sea has garnered significant attention. The high concentration of commercial goods flowing through the relatively narrow Strait of Malacca has raised concerns about its vulnerability as a strategic chokepoint. Writings on the South China Sea frequently claim that \$5.3 trillion worth of goods transits through the South China Sea annually, with \$1.2 trillion of that total accounting for trade with the U.S. This \$5.3 trillion figure has been used regularly since late 2010, despite significant changes in world trade over the last five-plus years. (6) It falls along the most critical sea lanes in trade and commerce for both oceans. The Sea, therefore, is a delicate water space with overlapping and conflicting claims (under the UNCLOS and historical records) by the surrounding countries. The SCS is a bellwether for determining leadership between two major powers: The United States and China. The United States is still the predominant power, while China remains the front running challenger. Consequently, a transition is underway that is fraught with risks and uncertainty. (7) Expert has being suggested; This Sea is a climacteric and pivotal trade route in the earth as well as a prospective source of hydrocarbons. While geographically the US is not a part of these territorial disputes, it still has significant maritime interests in the SCS in terms of both freedom of navigation and security for maritime trade and transportation. For the US, the SCS, because of its maritime route connecting the Pacific Ocean in the east and Indian Ocean in the south, also promotes strategic cooperation - both military and economic - with the nations in the region. In this excerpt from “Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea And The End Of A Stable Pacific,” author Robert D. Kaplan, chief geopolitical analyst Strategies for and former member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, explains how the region's unique geography fosters aggression. The South China Sea functions as the throat of the Western Pacific and Indian oceans the mass of connective economic tissue where global sea routes coalesce. Here is the heart of Eurasia's navigable rimland, punctuated by the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar straits. (8) Following the implications of the dispute on the claimant countries, we also must look at the impact on external countries such as the United States, Japan, and the European Union. Their primary concerns in this matter are

based on their respective national security as well as global security. Furthermore, it is important to discuss the implications of the dispute on international trade. For the East Asian economies such as Japan, the South China Sea is extremely important for its economic and strategic lifeline since more than eighty percent of its oil imports are transported through these waterways. (9)

## III. NINE DASH LINE: CHINESE DEMARCATION

At various times also referred to as the “10-dash line” and the “11-dash line”—refer to the undefined (10). vaguely located, demarcation used initially by the Republic of China (1912-1949) and subsequently the governments of the Republic of China (ROC / Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), for their claims of the major part of the South China Sea (11) The disputed area in the South China Sea includes the Paracel Islands the Spratly Islands (12) and many other areas including the Pratas Islands the Macclesfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal The claim surrounding the area of Chinese land reclamation known as the “great wall of sand” (13) An early map showing a U-shaped eleven-dash line was published in the then Republic of China on 1 December 1947. Two of the dashes in the Gulf of Tonkin were later red at the behest of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai reducing the total to nine. Thus 11dash line becomes 9 dash lines. Subsequent editions added a dash to the other end of the line, extending it into the East China Sea (14)

## IV. SOUTH CHINA SEA: CHINA AND PACIFIC RIVALS CONFLICTS

The South China Sea is one of the major flashpoints of world politics. China claims the entire sea as its territory—via the now much discussed nine-dash line. This claim is countered by rival claims of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan and Indonesia. The United States's interest is part legal—freedom of navigation—and part geopolitical, i.e. preventing Chinese hegemony in East Asia and beyond (15). In pacific region water has been more responsible of friction than cooperation. On top of all the entanglements among the claimant parties themselves, it seems that the South China Sea issue has become a focal point of strategic rivalry among major powers in the region. The United States is adopting a policy that is increasingly interventionist. Japan and India have also become more interested in engaging in multilateral discussion on the South China Sea issue. Some regional claimant states seem to be happy to involve external powers in order to gain some leverage against China. (16). Actually, there are seven/ several claimant state claim sovereignty over South China Sea i.e. China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Taiwan. Besides these seven claimants state, United States, Australia, Japan, India are already involved with political game in South China Sea issue against China. U.S.A, However, want to baffle to china in this range with her allies. In the meantime, Australia has concurred with Whitehouse to assist them.

### 1. *United States of America: A player of Political Gambling*

The South China Sea--a zone of conflict between China, Southeast Asian nations, and the United States--appears, on the surface, to have quieted down over the past six months. China and five other nations claim parts of the South China Sea, which has strategic significance and potentially sizable petroleum deposits. Last year, the United States publicly warned Beijing that free passage, and a resolution to claims accepted by all parties, was a U.S. "national interest." The United States has treaty allies in the region, sends ships through the South China Sea regularly, and views the waters as critically strategic. This position, however, infuriated China

(17) In October 2015, the Obama Administration responded to China's actions by launching "freedom of navigation" naval patrols in the South China Sea, sending a clear signal that America would not be chased out of the area. By all indications, the Trump administration is likely to be more aggressive in resisting China in the South China Sea and more forceful about preventing the erosion of America's position in the region (18) Washington's approach to the South China Sea can be depicted as standing firm in principle and somewhat flexible in practice. The U.S. democracies subscribe is "freedom of Navigation," which is enshrined in key documents such as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei all have competing claims. China has backed its expansive claims with island-building and naval patrols. The US says it does not take sides in territorial disputes, but has sent military ships and planes near disputed islands, calling them "freedom of navigation" operations to ensure access to key shipping and air routes. Both sides have accused each other of "militarizing" the South China Sea

The United States has oiled in tension in this region by performing sending naval vessels and playing political gambling with china as key players into the region. Part of this game, The U.S.A signed Trans Pacific Partnership that engage many countries within the region. The U.S.'s involvement stoke the tension in this the area, besides undermine china. U.S. has taken, however the, military activities in the South China Sea Perhaps because of this history, and the U.S.'s vested interest in the region, China claims that it is the United States that is militarizing the region. Actually, these two countries both China and U.S.A have interest to play key roles throughout Southeast Asia. Despite PLA's warn, U.S. presence in the region, continues to militarize the South China Sea with the support her allies .But then it is true , U.S has got slightest success to make controversy of Chinese demarcation of 9 dash line. So now the international community believes is the PCA'S ruling. Truly one ne of the main reasons of South China Sea is a geopolitical quarrelling because of rich resources it contains. In October 2015, the Obama Administration responded to China's actions by launching "freedom of navigation" naval

patrols in the South China Sea, sending a clear signal that America would not be chased out of the area. By all indications, the Trump administration is likely to be more aggressive in resisting China in the South China Sea and more forceful about preventing the erosion of America's position in the region.

Blocking Chinese access to islands in the South China Sea would require the US to "wage war", an influential Chinese state-run tabloid said on Friday, after US secretary of state nominee Rex Tillerson suggested the strategy on Wednesday. Tillerson told his confirmation hearing before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he wanted to send a signal to China that their access to islands in the disputed South China Sea "is not going to be allowed". The United States would have to "wage a large-scale war" in the South China Sea to prevent Chinese access to the islands, the Global Times said in an English language editorial. "Tillerson had better bone up on nuclear power strategies if he wants to force a big nuclear power to withdraw from its own territories," the paper added (19). The U.S. pivot to the area, coupled with the region's myriad conflicts, raises concerns about the future of U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. The Obama administration has not only worked to strengthen ties with ASEAN, but has also forged tighter relations with individual countries like Myanmar, where it has developed a new focus and strategy of engagement. The United States has also ramped up security cooperation with Vietnam, while Malaysia and Singapore have also signalled desire for increased security cooperation. A 2012 Johns Hopkins paper notes that Southeast Asia has transformed in the last two decades to an area where Chinese power and strategic ambition confront an established U.S. military presence, and where a Chinese perception of the status of the South China Sea is fundamentally at odds with a long-settled consensus among major maritime states. ( 20 )

The United States' ability to project force into the South China Sea stems from the Seventh Fleet's home base at Yokosuka, Japan and Kadena Air Force base located on Okinawa. Additional U.S. Marine Corps ground forces and air units are also stationed on Okinawa, roughly 2,040 km (1,100 n.m.) northeast of the South China Sea. Meanwhile, 1,700 NM east of the South China Sea, the United States possesses an enormous Air Force base on Guam. While the Marine Corps basing arrangement on Okinawa remain locally controversial, Guam comprises U.S. sovereign territory and sits squarely in the second island chain. Upheld by the Philippine Supreme Court in 2016, a ten-year U.S.- Philippine security agreement comprises another scenario that has yet to completely manifest itself (21) Donald Trump vowed on Monday that the United States would prevent China from taking over territory in international waters in the South China Sea; something Chinese state media has warned would require Washington to "wage war." The comments at a briefing from White House spokesman Sean Spicer signaled a sharp departure from years of cautious U.S. handling of China's assertive pursuit of territory claims in Asia; just days after

Trump took office on Friday. Military experts said that while the U.S. Navy has extensive capabilities in Asia to stage blockading operations with ships, submarines and planes, any such move against China's growing naval fleets would risk dangerous escalation (22)

## 2. India: Intend to Regional Supremacy

What exactly is India's position on the South China Sea? In two recent international joint statements, India has taken slightly different positions on the biggest point of international conflict that is about to come to a head, in the coming days. On April 18, foreign ministers of India, China and Russia stated after an RIC meeting in Moscow that "Russia, India and China are committed to maintaining a legal order for the seas and oceans based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UN Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) (23)

The region's economic importance translates into national security interests for New Delhi. With half of its maritime trade passing through the Malacca Straits, any instability in the SCS would adversely affect the shipping lanes and have a knock-on effect on India's economy. Similarly, should a potentially hostile power come to control this region, it could threaten India's access to this vital waterway. New Delhi's involvement in the SCS thus, focuses on three objectives. First, to ensure peace and stability in the region and keep the vital sea lanes open; second, to maintain cordial relations with regional powers; and third, to ensure that no potentially aggressive external power comes to dominate the region (24). India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi hasn't forgotten that either, and he may spoil China's ambitions to dominate the South China Sea. Modi didn't miss the chance to bring up the July arbitration ruling during his recent visits to Singapore and Vietnam, trying to revive the allied front against China's ambitions (25)

## Australia: Lip Service to U.S.A in pacific region

America and Australia are working hard to tame China's ambition to turn the South China Sea into its own sea, as the Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is giving up. Specifically, the two countries are teaming up to develop the Lombrum naval base on Manus Island. Last September, the two countries performed joint naval exercises in the region, though Australian vessels avoided disputed areas Australia has expressed concerns about China's "aggressive tactics" in the South China Sea after a Chinese navy destroyer sailed within yards of an American warship on the weekend. Christopher Pyne Australia's defence minister said the Morrison government would view any use of intimidation in the region as "destabilizing and potentially dangerous" (26). All three arms of Australia's military will be involved in two weeks of international security exercises in the South China Sea starting on Tuesday. Australia strongly supports "freedom of navigation" conventions in the contested area, after China recently militarized their man-made islands in the important trading channel. "This exercise will include a field training

element, live fire serials as well as a command post exercise that will test the operability of Australian maritime, land and air elements," Group Captain Nicholas Pratt said in a statement on Monday. Australia will send nine Hornet fighters, four other aircraft, two naval ships and a platoon of Australian Army soldiers from Rifle Company Butterworth. The South China Sea is subject to competing territorial claims from Asian nations, but Australia has repeatedly said it should stay open to vessels from all countries (27)

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

"We are strongly committed to safeguard the country's sovereignty and security, and defending our territorial integrity."

- Chinese President Xi Jinping

This analysis focuses on the territorial dispute on South China Sea that has largely created huge tension in East South Asia. There are many powerful states which are strongly involved in regional hegemony. For the United States, South China Sea's significance lies not only in its resources and geographical importance; it also plays a vital role in the United States' influence in Asia and strengthening its position as a primary naval power, Said Dr. James Tong, professor and director of the Center for East Asian Studies at UCLA.

*"Helping these smaller countries confront China's military power allows the United States enhance its presence in the Asia-Pacific region "*

Recently, Donald Trump administration signed "Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into Law" which intends to support of Taiwan from Chinese ruling. Japan, AUSTRLIA, India are also non-claimant state that are making direct support on U.S policy to reduce Chinese influence in this region. On the contrary, China is increasing naval and military capacity in South China sea. Actually, Beijing has no intention to give a slight mercy on SCS issues. Scholars are forecasting, the next wide war may be occurred on this issue and it can bring nuclear war as the three nuclear states are direct involved in South China dispute. China is systematically and gradually developing Chinese influences on this Sea. Xiping, government already made artificial islands on SCS. By 2030, China will be such an superpower that the South China Sea will be "Chinese lake," the Center for Strategic and International Studies writes in a new report. China's supremacy in the region is cause to Beijing's projected continual development of aircraft carrier groups, militarizing, and the People Liberation Army's focus on expanding its capacity to operate overseas. Citing a Chinese white paper, CSIS notes that "the PLA in the near future will be operating well beyond the First Island Chain and into the Indian Ocean The call for the PLA to adopt this expanded mission set is of greatest concern to the United States, as it will gradually extend the reach of the PLA and emphasize 'nontraditional security operations.'"

Jeremy Bender writes reports, in Business Insider news, (21 January, 2016) where he mentioned CSIS project that China will invest heavily in the development and deployment of multiple aircraft carrier groups. This sudden influx of Chinese military assets, coupled with their ability to project power, will ensure that by 2030 "the South China Sea will be virtually a Chinese lake, as the Caribbean or the Gulf of Mexico is for the United States today."

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