

Assessment of Recent Developments in the South China Sea and their Implications to
Regional Security and Cooperation

**Is Time Running Out: The Urgency for Full, Final and Equitable Resolution of the South
China Sea Imbroglia**

by
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Abstract

In 2010 China surprised the world with its assertion that it considered South China Sea as core interest at par with Taiwan and Tibet. Around that time other countries were subjected to a stronger pitch by China on issues that remain unresolved. The cumulative effect of its hardened posture made the world and more so countries of the region as well as the major players sit up and take note. It resulted in a definitive backlash. Sensing that it may have prematurely disclosed its hand, the Chinese government hastily changed course and has now gone out of its way to reassure the world of its peaceful rise.

Meanwhile major developments that have a bearing on the region have come to the fore. A deeper analysis of the prevailing situation is indicative of opportunities that have surfaced. These could conceivably allow for a transition to lasting peace in the region. A window of opportunity that could hardly have been envisioned just a year ago has opened up. It is in the interest of all regional players to seize this historic opportunity. The paper examines the avenues that have opened up and explores the pathway for an enduring and just settlement in the South China Sea.

Introductory Remarks

In moving forward to a sustainable and equitable paradigm it has to be kept in mind that with Euro-Atlanticism being in comparative retreat, Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean will now be the dominant theatres for the rest of the Century. The economic strength of the region will again become a magnet for countries from other parts of the world for commerce as well as for the geopolitical realignments on a global scale that are bound to follow the shift of the centre of gravity from the West after nearly three centuries of dominance to the east. It is against this backdrop that the latest developments in the South China Sea urgently beckon a settlement that should be ecologically sustainable, economically just and equitable for all people living in the region. Hence, the abstract from an earlier talk delivered in November 2010 at the HCMC Conclave should remain in focus for the current dialogue as well.

Quote

“It is almost a historical truism that whenever a major intervention in the geopolitical domain by a world power takes place, it is seldom, if ever, possible to get back to the status quo ante. Something on these lines has taken place in 2010 in South China Sea region, where China’s military and economic surge has reached proportions that could dwarf the combined might of the other countries having geographic contiguity to the South China Sea”.

Unquote

The Preponderance of the China Factor

At a North Asia-South Asia conference held not long ago (5-6 March 2011) at Khatmandu, Nepal the invitee for delivering the keynote address on the “Perspective of Peace and Security in Asia”, .said only in half-seriousness that he could, realistically speaking, give the answer in one word: ‘Awful’. Evidently, meaning thereby that he considered the prospects for peace in the region as very bleak. The speaker** then went on to explain his troubling comment at the very commencement of his talk. According to him the most glaring sign was the awesome armaments build up by some of the most important countries in East, Southeast and South Asia as a direct result of China’s stupendous rise in its military capability and economic might. The ensuing paragraphs give a glimpse of the military build up in the region on the part of China’s neighbors to augment their security.

New Arms Race in the Region

China: China's buildup looms large. China's total defense spending was \$78 billion in 2010, up from \$17 billion in 2001, according to government reports. Western defense officials say those totals do not include arms imports. The U.S. Defense Department has estimated that China's total military-related spending in 2009 was \$150 billion. China does not disclose details about arms purchases. Figures made public by the Russian government indicate that China spent more than \$17 billion on Russian arms imports between 2001 and 2010. Adding that figure to Chinese spending on domestic arms procurement Western defense experts estimate that China has spent about \$150 billion on new weapons over the past decade.

India: Six 217-foot Scorpène-class attack submarines to be built over the next few years in addition to stealth frigates and guided-missile destroyers. It is augmenting its military strength in several other areas. It purchased eight maritime reconnaissance and antisubmarine aircraft from Boeing Co. for \$2.1 billion in 2009, and the government recently approved an order for another four, says an Indian navy spokesman. The goal is to upgrade India's snooping capabilities and

replace outdated Russian planes. Several aerospace firms are in the running for an estimated \$10.5 billion contract for 126 fighter jets India's largest-ever defense order.

Other ASEAN & East Asia Nations: In December 2010, Japan overhauled its defense guidelines, laying plans to purchase five submarines, three destroyers, 12 fighter jets, 10 patrol planes and 39 helicopters. South Korea and Vietnam are adding submarines. Arms imports are on the rise in Malaysia. The tiny city-state of Singapore, which plans to add two submarines, is now among the world's top 10 arms importers. Australia plans to spend as much as \$279 billion over the next 20 years on new submarines, destroyers and fighter planes. Together, these efforts amount to a simultaneous buildup of advanced weaponry in the Asia-Pacific region on a scale and at a speed not seen since the Cold War arms race between America and the Soviet Union. South Korea and Vietnam are expected to get six more submarines apiece by 2020. Australia plans to add 12 over the next 20 years. Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia are each adding two. Together, the moves constitute one of the largest buildups of submarines since the early years of the Cold War. Asian nations are expected to buy as many as 111 subs over the next 20 years, according to AMI International, which provides market research to governments and shipbuilders. Australia's planned \$279 billion of military spending over the next 20 years will fund the biggest expansion of its military since World War II. In December 2010 Japan overhauled its defense guidelines, drawn up in the Cold War and directed principally at the Soviet Union, to focus more on China. The new guidelines call for spending as much as \$284 billion between 2011 and 2015 to modernize Japan's Self-Defense Forces. Japan proposed deploying more U.S. Patriot missiles, prompting China to protest that such a move would trigger a regional arms race.

Taiwan. According to a lawmaker in Taipei, Taiwan has deployed a new supersonic missile on its warships in the latest response to China's rapid naval expansion. Military authorities were reportedly mulling deploying the Hsiung Feng III – the first locally developed supersonic anti-ship missile on mobile launchers, Lin Yu-fang, of the Kuomintang party, said in a statement quoting Vice Admiral Lee Hao. “Several types of warships have been armed with Hsiung Feng IIIs (Brave Wind)”, the statement said. It was not clear how many missiles would be produced but according to Lin, eight Perry class frigates and seven patrol boats will be fitted with the weapon. Analysts say Hsiung Feng III, designed to cruise at a maximum speed of mach 2.0 or twice the speed of sound with a range of up to 130 kilometres (80 miles) are difficult to defend against. Taiwan's defence ministry has expressed alarm at China's naval buildup although experts say it may still take time for the People's Liberation Army to operate its first carrier group complete with fighter jets.

Taiwan plans to build a new 'stealth' warship armed with guided-missiles next year in response, military officers have said. *Agence France Presse reproduced in The Statesman New Delhi Monday 9 May 2011, P # 13*

South Korea is worried about China's continued support for North Korea, and that growing Chinese military power will limit U.S. capacity to intervene if war breaks out on the Korean peninsula. In 2006, South Korea launched a 15-year military-modernization program projected to cost about \$550 billion, with about one-third slated for arms purchases. The program has since been reviewed after two attacks on the South by the North last year. Military analysts expect South Korea to spend more on conventional weapons designed to defend it against the North, including submarines, destroyers, F-15 fighter jets and possibly F-35s.

Vietnam and China, once steadfast allies against the U.S, are now feuding over Chinese territorial claims in the oil-and-gas-rich South China Sea. Vietnam does not have an economy or budget big enough to go toe-to-toe with China procuring weapons. In lieu of a big arms buildup, it is opening up a prized military asset, its deep-water port in Cam Ranh Bay, in the hopes that foreign navies will steam into the South China Sea and help secure the region's shipping lanes. "Offering Cam Ranh Bay to foreign navies is a master stroke," says Carlyle Thayer, a professor at the Australian Defence Force Academy at the University of New South Wales. "It will attract precisely those navies that can be expected to keep China's naval ambitions in check." (Contributions by *Julian E. Barnes, Patrick Barta, Tom Wright and others*).

Russia. Meanwhile the Russian government announced a US \$ 650 billion programme for further augmenting its formidable military capability. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has promised to re-arm the Russian armed forces and make Russia one of the world's top five economies over the next decade, arguing the country must be strong to resist foreign interference. Speaking in Parliament, Mr. Putin laid out a \$700-billion programme of across-the-board modernization of Russia's war arsenals by 2020. The production of ballistic missiles will be doubled from 2013; the armed forces will induct new missile systems, such as the long-range RS-24 Yars and Bulova and the short-range Iskander, and the S-500 anti-missiles capable of knocking down targets in space. "We must completely re-equip the armed forces in the next 10 years," he said. *By Vladimir Radyhin The Hindu, Thursday April 21, 2011.P#16*

What About the US? The occasion: the ceremonial cutting of the first piece of a \$15 billion aircraft carrier slated to weigh anchor in 2020. That ship-still unnamed-will follow the just-as-costly Gerald R .Ford, now 20% built and due to set sail in 2015. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, China is putting the final touches on a new class of DF-21 missiles expressly designed to sink the Ford and its sister ship as well as their 5,000-person crews. China's missiles, which will likely cost about \$10 million each, could keep the Navy's carriers so far away

from Taiwan that the short-range aircraft they bear would be useless in any conflict over the tiny island's fate. "It points to an almost tragic irony of Washington's \$700 billion annual appetite from military stores: we are borrowing cash from China to pay for weapons that we would presumably use against it. If the Chinese want to slay us, they don't need to attack us with their missiles. They just have to call in their loans. We are an increasingly muscle-bound nation: we send \$1 billion destroyers, with crews of 300 each, to handle five Somali pirates in a fiberglass skiff." *By Mark Thompson, Time Magazine April 25, 2011 P #18*

Some Later Developments. . China's decision to hold the BRICS Summit at Sanya, located at the Southern tips of the Hainan island was hardly accidental. The strategic symbolism of Sanya and the Hainan Islands is that Sanya is located close to the disputed Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly) Islands in the South China Sea, which China has recently declared as an area of "core interest," like Tibet and Taiwan. The Hainan submarine base, where five nuclear submarines, each armed with 12 nuclear-tipped ICBMS are deployed in underground caves will also be the home of China's first aircraft carrier, located adjacent to Sanya. Chinese naval power concentrated in Sanya has evoked serious concern in both ASEAN and India. According to an Indian diplomat, hosting the BRICS Summit in Sanya was evidently a not too subtle message to the world about China's growing military muscle. *G. Parthasarthy, The Pioneer New Delhi Thursday April 28, 2011 P# 8*

Adding it all Up

Adding up the costs, it leaves little to the imagination that unless the trend toward the awesome arms build up is first halted and then reversed – an unlikely proposition going by current trends - armed conflicts or skirmishes could become routine. The total costs of the armaments intake adds up to several trillion dollars. The build up is so gigantic in scale and diversity that should a skirmish between the contenders blow up into a larger conflict involving several interested countries the overall damage could be so extensive that at one extreme it could put paid to China's global superpower ambitions and at the other considerably affect the economic well-being of several ASEAN countries, besides inflicting damage on other countries. Evidently, de-escalation cannot commence without China taking the lead or at the very least arriving at an equitable and just resolution of the South China Sea dispute.

The (Overwhelming) Preponderance of the Environmental Factor

Well before 2020 – possibly by 2015 – climate change, global warming and ecological degradation factors, collectively being put under the heading 'Environmental Factor' will overwhelm China and all other countries around the disputed area. China already faces severe problems posed by rampant

desertification, polluted rivers and depleted ground water reserves. By 2020, China will have 130 million cars; by 2040, even more cars than the United States. Taking into account that China obtains 70 per cent of its energy needs from coal and that it typically uses six to seven times more energy to produce a dollar of output than do developed economies, the extent of the calamity that may engulf China and, by extension, the world becomes clear. According to China's own official estimates, the effects of chronic pollution, large-scale damming, and climate change have combined to make for a situation where 70 percent of the country's rivers and lakes are polluted to some degree, with 28 percent being too polluted even for irrigation or industrial use. A recent World Bank report estimates the health costs related to outdoor air pollution in urban China in 2003 to be between 157 billion Yuan (\$21 billion) and 520 billion Yuan (\$69 billion) – depending on the method of calculation used. This means 1.2 to 3.8 per cent of GDP. Faced with this critical situation, the Chinese government has little choice but to start taking serious measures to counteract and slow down environmental degradation even if it means putting the brakes on economic growth. There are obvious lessons for India to draw as it pushes toward matching economic growth at a pace that the environment may not be able to sustain.

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The crisis in Japan has been described as "a nuclear war without a war". Its potential repercussions, which are yet to be fully assessed, are far more serious than the Chernobyl disaster, as acknowledged by several scientists. The Japanese government has been obliged to acknowledge that "the severity rating of its nuclear crisis matches that of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster". Moreover, the dumping of highly radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean constitutes a potential trigger to a process of global radioactive contamination. Radioactive elements have not only been detected in the food chain in Japan, radioactive rain water has been recorded in California:

"Hazardous radioactive elements being released in the sea and air around Fukushima accumulate at each step of various food chains (for example, into algae, crustaceans, small fish, bigger fish, then humans; or soil, grass, cow's meat and milk, then humans). Entering the body, these elements - called internal emitters - migrate to specific organs such as the thyroid, liver, bone, and brain, continuously irradiating small volumes of cells with high doses of alpha, beta and/or gamma radiation, and over many years often induce cancer". Scientists say that over the next 30 years there is an 87 percent chance that a massive Tokai earthquake will strike – and the Hamaoka plant stands near the centre of the earthquake's anticipated focal area.

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China admits Three Gorges Dam problems

In a rare admission China has acknowledged that the biggest dam in the world, Three Gorges, on the Yangtze River, has caused a range of environmental

problems that need to be urgently addressed. A statement issued after a cabinet meeting headed by Premier Wen Jiabao said while the project had played a key role in flood prevention and power generation, it had caused severe problems to the environment, shipping agricultural and water supplies in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, an area of 633,000 sq km shared by eight provinces. The Three Gorges Project, built with a budget of USD 22.5 billion, is a multi-functional water control system, consisting of a dam, a five-tier ship dock and 26 hydropower turbo-generators. The official admission came as a lingering drought in central and southern China has left residents and livestock without drinking water and dried up rivers across the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

“In China’s thousands of years of civilisation, the conflict between humankind and nature has never been as serious as it is today,” China’s environment minister, Zhou Shengxian, said recently. “The depletion, deterioration and exhaustion of resources and the worsening ecological environment have become bottlenecks and grave impediments to the nation’s economic and social development.” What China’s minister is telling us, says Gilding, is that “the Earth is full”. *Thomas L. Friedman The New York Times, The Indian Express New Delhi Thursday June 9, 2011 P # 13*

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Sea Levels to Rise by 35” to 63” Due to Arctic Ice Melting

A new assessment of climate change in the Arctic shows the region’s ice and snow are melting faster than previously thought and sharply raises projections of global sea level rise this century .According to a report by the international Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program(AMAP), the cover of sea ice on the Arctic Ocean is shrinking faster. The level of summer ice coverage has been in near record lows ever since 2001, it said, predicting that the Arctic Ocean will be nearly ice free in summer within 30-40 years. *The Economic Times New Delhi Monday 23 May 23, 2011 P# 23*

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The world's oceans are faced with an unprecedented loss of species comparable to the great mass extinctions of prehistory, a major report suggests. The seas are degenerating far faster than anyone has predicted, the report says, because of the cumulative impact of a number of severe individual stresses, ranging from climate warming and sea-water acidification, to widespread chemical pollution and gross over-fishing. The coming together of these factors is now threatening the marine environment with a catastrophe "unprecedented in human history", according to the report, from a panel of leading marine scientists brought together in Oxford earlier this year by the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The stark suggestion made by the panel is that the potential extinction of species, from large fish at one end of the scale to tiny corals at the other, is directly comparable to the five great mass extinctions in the geological record, during each of which much of

the world's life died out. The panel of 27 scientists, who considered the latest research from all areas of marine science, concluded that a "combination of stressors is creating the conditions associated with every previous major extinction of species in Earth's history". They concluded that the speed and rate of degeneration of the oceans is far faster than anyone has predicted. Besides, many of the negative impacts identified are greater than the worst predictions. The report also said that the first steps to globally significant extinction may have already begun. The panel of experts "found firm evidence" that the effects of climate change, coupled with other human-induced impacts such as over-fishing and nutrient run-off from farming, have already caused a dramatic decline in ocean health. COURTESY: *THE INDEPENDENT*. By Michael McCarthy, *The Times of India New Delhi Wednesday, June 22, 2011 P# 21*.

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In India there is great anxiety over the reported diversion of the Brahmaputra water by China, which is constructing several dams over most, if not all rivers flowing into the countries of South and South East Asia from the Tibetan Plateau. Like the irreversible damage that has occurred in the Three Gorges dam (now that the dam is in place, apparently no amount of money can fix the problem) in the post-Fukushima era, one can hope that governments would far more carefully study the geology around the mega projects that China seems to be bent upon going ahead with, unmindful of the consequences for the countries through which these rivers flow to the sea, seriously affecting the deltaic regions where population density is the highest. Such has been the case with the Indus River delta in Pakistan. These 'irreversible' issues should trigger fresh researches into the most seismic region on the planet: the Tibetan plateau. The officials planning the construction of myriads of dams on the Tibetan rivers should take into account the seismic conditions before starting the constructions. This cannot be solved once dams are built.

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Conclusions from the Environmental Imperilment of the Region

From the snippets of environmental imperilment mentioned above it should become evident that unless China, ASEAN, India and the other countries on the periphery collectively come together to save the region from further environmental decline, seemingly important, but relatively insignificant disputes like the South China Sea stand off between China and several ASEAN countries or border disputes could soon become minor blips against the approaching cataclysms that could soon engulf all countries. The earthquake and tsunami that has prostrated Japan is a definite precursor to similar threats faced by all other countries in the neighborhood. China's frenzied mega projects of diversion of water from Tibetan

rivers flowing through several countries dependent upon them as well as the construction of numerous dams is bound to lead to induced seismic tremors of much higher intensities - within China and the neighboring countries. No joint studies are being allowed by China on the effects of these rapid fire activities on the ecology or long-term effects on the populations of the lower riparian states dependent on these very waterways. Inter-basin river authorities that should have been set up before indulging in unilateral schemes that can have long-term deleterious effects on the ecology, climate and geomorphology of all its neighbors have not been countenanced by China. It is reflective of an attitude that permeates China's relations with its neighbors in many other ways.

Within the lifetime of the present generation or probably the next, sea-level rise will threaten all coastal habitations that from time immemorial have nurtured the densest human settlements. It used to be said that time is running out for the inhabitants of the planet. For those who can look ahead, time has already run out. If the leaders of countries involved in petty squabbles, when measured against the major survival threats, are unable to settle their differences amicably civil societies in these countries must come together to enlarge the dialogue to ward off the common dangers in the borrowed time that might still remain. In sum the environmental imperative dwarfs all other considerations that govern relations between countries.

The Extra-Regional Players

The well-known writer Nayan Chanda in a recent comment has noted that China's rise in Asia has faithfully tracked the eruption of tensions between the US (and even the Soviet Union) and its erstwhile partners. China had long claimed islands of the South China Sea, but only launched its first attack to capture the Paracels from South Vietnam in 1974 when Washington signaled its disinterest in defending its ally. The next attack on the communist Vietnam occupied Spratly Islands came when a weak Soviet Union was unwilling to come to its treaty ally's defence. Similarly, says Chanda the violent suppression of pro-democracy forces in Burma in 1988 and the subsequent isolation of the country opened the door for China to emerge as the junta's most influential backer. China made further advances in the South China Sea when it took over the Philippines-claimed Mischief Reef in 1995 - three years after Manila stopped hosting US military bases in the country. The 1997 coup in Phnom Penh, which brought condemnation of the Hun Sen regime, saw China once again step in with economic and military aid. As a result, it now counts Cambodia as a close ally. *Nayan Chanda, The Times of India, New Delhi Saturday May 14, 2011 P#24*

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According to Joseph S Nye a Chinese military posture that is too aggressive could produce a countervailing coalition among its neighbors, thereby weakening China's hard and soft power. In 2010, for example, as China became more

assertive in its foreign policy towards its neighbors, its relations with India, Japan and South Korea suffered. As a result, Nye avers, China will find it more difficult to exclude the US from Asia's security arrangements. *Joseph S Nye, Times of India, New Delhi April 27, 2011*

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Meanwhile, notwithstanding the reduced number of US forces deployed in the Pacific, the US has not remained passive to Chinese naval build-up in the region. It is increasing its capability to operate in Asia by deploying more forces in Guam, coordination with Japan in interoperability, sale of advanced weapon systems to Taiwan, deployment of anti-missile systems and increasing surveillance of Chinese naval deployments. Overall, most Asian countries prefer the US to maintain a strong presence in the Asia Pacific region to ensure a degree of deterrence to Chinese ambitions in the region.

America's stake in Asia is enormous - nearly a trillion dollars in annual trade, billions of dollars of investment, to say nothing of the security of its allies, its global standing and the importance of the South China Sea that carries a third of the world's trade. Concrete reasons aside, for the US not to counter perceptions of declining commitment to the region would undermine its influence.

Going by the preceding paragraphs it is hardly any wonder that countries threatened by China would want the USA to remain in the region as a counter to China's growing power and aggressiveness. Periodic bouts of reasonableness and good neighborly solicitude emanating from Beijing hardly reassure China's neighbors, who by now are well-versed in Chinese art of warfare and diplomacy as practiced by it through the ages.

Can India be described as an Extra-Regional Power

As China's military demonstrates greater capability, and China shows greater assertiveness, a number of countries are looking at the US as a hedge to make sure they can maintain their independence, security and stability. Of late these allies have started questioning whether the United States can retain its freedom to operate in the region, and whether its economy, so highly dependent on China and struggling with recession, can sustain its high level of military spending and far off deployments. The doubt about future US capabilities or their efficacy has automatically made them look towards India as the regional balancer.

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The anxiety about China includes Australia that now wishes India to take the lead in forging an Asia-Pacific community on the lines of the European Union. During his visit to India in 2009, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd expressed that India was central to Asia-Pacific community and Australia and India ought to be natural partners in this region where big power rivalries would have to be 'harmonised and reconciled'. A Positive step in this relationship was the signing

of the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in Nov 2009 between the two countries. (Australian PM Rudd's visit to India Dec 2009, Australian Deputy Secretary (Strategy)

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Similar overtures have been made to India from time to time by Japan, South Korea and the majority of the ASEAN countries. It was only in 1992 that India belatedly and reluctantly launched the 'Look East' policy. India is now the 3rd largest economy in Asia after China and Japan. Whatever China may make of it, *none* of the ASEAN countries, East Asian or for that matter Asia-Pacific countries look upon India as anything other than a benign presence. India, in fact, lends *balanced multi-polarity* to the South China Sea region and the whole of Asia, if not the world. India can by no stretch of imagination be considered an extra-regional player, like for example the United States of America for the simple reason that over the millennia Indian culture and thought pervaded all countries around it, spreading as far East as China, Japan and Korea. As a matter of fact, Chinese writers of the earlier centuries were wont to describe the country beyond the Himalayas as the 'Western Heaven'. Millennia of peace, goodwill and harmony with the Indic influences have nurtured in all its East Asian neighbors a profound sense of comfort with its presence. To this day India remains a force for stability.

A Blueprint for Resolve

Elementary first steps that might help in the resolution of the contentious SCS issues that were spelled out at the conference held in Ho Chi Minh City in November 2010 by the speaker that could have formed the basis for lasting peace in the region are listed below:

- Declaration of the Paracel and Spratley group of islands in the South China Sea as a marine ecology park;
- Pledge to halt further occupation, construction activity, militarization or stationing of naval ships in the Spratleys as well as the Paracels;
- Gradual dismantling of existing military structures by a given date (say 31 December 2012) and further declaration of the SCS as a Zone of Peace.
- A common approach to exploitation of natural resources in the areas under dispute. A Resource Exploitation Commission of countries contiguous to the disputed islands should be empowered to undertake exploitation on behalf of all parties and proceeds to be shared on a pro rata or any other basis decided by the Commission and ratified by the concerned countries;
- All further exploitation to cease till the Commission has completed its work and obtained ratification.

Proposals of this nature, including more elaborate ones have been put forward by several experts from within ASEAN and from elsewhere from time to time.

Evidently, they have not been found acceptable by some or one of the parties to the dispute. Up to the end of 2010 the dispute could have been allowed to linger on. That is no longer the case. The rapid acquisition of the new generation of armaments by the contenders to the dispute as well as the overwhelming preponderance of the *environmental imperative* do not allow for the luxury of further delay in the amicable resolution of the South China Sea disputes. Fresh avenues that could be explored are listed below:

- Diplomacy through regional chambers of commerce, academia; people-to-people contacts;
- An inter-country group of experts to examine the common elements of survival;
- What are the elements that can be seen as enablers;
- Non-traditional security issues;
- Can the humanitarian aspects of the region be ignored (in view of climate change);
- Is it reasonable to assume that the command and control of the major sea lanes and passage vest with a single country;
- Is the dominance pattern of SCS solely motivated by economic considerations or is it linked to geo-strategic domination of the region;
- What are the longer-term challenges facing the SCS nations as a whole.

In nutshell, the aspects that divide and prevent resolutions of the disputes are unilateralism and developing *over-militarization of the region*, the latter being an extremely worrisome development. Aspects that point the way towards resolution relate to the environment, geography and commerce. At the earliest, the nations involved in the dispute should enter into N-F-U type of accord (borrowing the concept from nuclear deterrence) so that a clash between weapons of greater destructive potential like submarines is avoided. The No-First-Use concept automatically suggests certain other measures of similar type that can be introduced to prevent sudden escalation. These can be gone into by committees set up for the purpose.

Concluding Remarks

Dr. Edward De Bono, lateral thinking guru and inventor of Six Hats Theory has this to say about India-China relations: "If India can partner China, the two can become a super power in a short time. Alternately, if India and China can form a coalition for bringing other developing nations under its fold, it can beat all other super powers. (*The Economic Times*, New Delhi, 18 September 2007)

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Through several millennia Chinese civilization has influenced its neighbors. It enriched them culturally, through its scientific advances and commerce. Once again, after the humiliations visited on it in the preceding century, China has come

into its own. Its phenomenal economic leap has showered benefits on all its neighbors, China having become ASEAN's largest trade partner. Large Chinese communities are present in practically all countries in South East Asia. They too have enhanced trade and contributed to the richness of the societies in which they have remained embedded for generations. China's assertiveness, some would call it over-assertiveness, stems from the legacy of its troubled history. The grave problems that threaten the viability of life on the planet require the emerging great powers, especially China to take the lead in tackling them. Viewed against the magnitude of the planetary decline that is taking place before our eyes with each passing year, the ridiculously petty disputes over a few islands in the South China Sea should hardly be leading the nations around it to over-militarization that could build up its own irreversible momentum. Should a major conflagration develop with the newer types of weapons being inducted into the arsenals of each country the situation could get completely out of hand with dangerous consequences all round. It is to be hoped that well before such a situation develops good sense will prevail.

Speaker's Profile

*General Vinod Saighal retired from the Indian Army in 1995 from the post of Director General Military Training. Before that he had several active command assignments, including the command of an independent armoured formation and mountain and desert divisions. He has held an assignment with the UN Peacekeeping forces as well as tenure in Iran. He had served as the country's Military Attache in France and BENELUX. He speaks several languages including French and Persian. Currently he is the Executive Director of Eco Monitors Society a non-governmental organization concerned with demography and ecology. After retirement, he founded the Movement for Restoration of Good Government. He has lectured extensively in India and abroad on several burning issues of the day. Vinod Saighal was invited to join the 'Institutional Advisory Board' of USFSS (US Federation of Scientists and Scholars) in 2000. He has been International Conseiller to Centre d'Etude et de Prospective Strategique (CEPS), Paris, France since 1995. He is the author of the internationally acclaimed book 'Third Millennium Equipose'. Additionally, he has authored Restructuring South Asian Security, Restructuring Pakistan, Dealing with Global Terrorism: The Way Forward and Global Security Paradoxes: 2000-2020. His first book was selected at the Caracas International Book Fair in November 2008 for a Spanish edition (title: Equilibrio en el Tercer Milenio).

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**** PERSPECTIVE OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN ASIA** (Talk delivered in Khatmandu on March 5, 2011 at the 2nd North and South Asia Joint Conference of IPPNW) by Vinod Saighal