

Indo-Pacific Region & South China Sea: Security Challenges

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Abstract: *The fact is that the U.S. national interest and China's foreign policy aims and objectives revolve around the security concerns in Pacific regions and South China Sea. Actually the US always desire to maintain this region free trade, safe and secure sea lines of communications and overall peace and stability. Therefore, the U.S. claim in this region has always been controversial in the U.S. and China security relation. Some of the maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region and South China Sea view the U.S. Military presence as necessary to allow decision making free of intimidation but if the maritime power in the South-China Sea lose their presence than it may create many other problems like free navigation, problem of piracy and terrorism etc. That is why; the U.S. makes it clear that its policy is based on*

risk reduction measures and confidence building measures among the claimants in the South-China Sea and moreover he advocates its full support for implementation of the China- ASEAN and subsequent agreement on a binding code of conduct. Therefore, the China also needs a favourable regional security environment and to work out with important initiatives with its neighbours. The present research paper highlights the security concerns in South-China Sea including the national interests of maritime powers. Moreover, the research paper highlights the process of risk-reduction measures in this region.

Keywords: South-China Sea, Security Concerns, Indo-Pacific Regions, Maritime Powers, Free Navigation, Terrorism, Demarcation.

Introduction: The Indo-Pacific means recognizing that the accelerating economic and security connection between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region are creating a single strategic system. As a strategic system it can be understood as a set of geopolitical power relationship among maritime powers where some major changes in part of the region can affect what happens in the other parts of this region. Actually, some of the foreign policy analysts assume the fact that the Indo-Pacific system is defined in part by the geographically expanding interest and reach of China and India, the continued strategic role and the presence of the U.S. in both the Pacific and Indian oceans. Moreover, it recognizes the arc of trade routes, energy flows, diplomatic bonds and strategic connections between the two oceans, and these links in long term may emerge especially in the perspective of China and India's security concerns as well as outward looking economic and military power expansion of their interest in this maritime zone of strategic importance. In particular, the

concept of Indo-Pacific region underscores the fact that the Indian Ocean has replaced the Atlantic as the global business trade routes and the most strategically significant corridor carrying the 2/3 of the world's oil shipments and 1/3 of the world's bulk cargo. That is why; these developments have made the Indo-Pacific region the world's economic and strategic centre of gravity in the current scenario. It is not simply a new name for the Asia-Pacific, but it is a radically re-defined regional concept carrying a due importance in the global relations.

South China Sea: The Strategic

Importance: However, the geographical location of the South China Sea is strategically very important for the maritime power like China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines on the basis of competing territorial and jurisdictional claims. Regarding the territorial rights of these powers to exploit the region's possibly extensive reserve oil and gas and freedom of navigation are the

contentious issues especially between the U.S. and China. Moreover, the U.S. military vessels to operate in China's 2/3 miles *Exclusive Economic Zones* are developing capabilities that would put the U.S. forces in the region at a risk of conflict. The growing importance of the U.S. China relationship and Asia-Pacific region are generally known as major national interest in preventing of various disputes in South-China Sea. The most dangerous contingency is a clash steaming from the U.S. Military operation with in China's Exclusive Economic Zones; but the U.S. holds that nothing in the U.N.O. convention on the law of Sea.

Furthermore, the strategic warning signals that have highlighted the risk of conflict include political decisions and statements by senior officials, unofficial media reports and logistical change and equipment modification by the maritime powers. For example, China may explicitly refer to the South-China Sea as a core interest; in 2010 Beijing hinted this was the case but

subsequently backed away from the assertion. It might also warned that it can't stand idly by as countries nibble away at China's territory, a formulation that in the past often singled willingness to use force. Even if not in China's policy would nevertheless a single pressure on Chinese leadership to work out against China's national interest. Similar warning may be indicated by other maritime powers. Thus keeping the, South China Sea open for commercial navigation is the top priority for the U.S. and China which would keep away this region from all disputes and security concerns in the coming years. Now according to the foreign policy analysis China has its own concerns regarding the military installation by the U.S. in this region.

Moreover, this region is very important and rich in fossil fuel. It is estimated that there are around 7.7 billion barrels oil reserves in South-China Sea. This region also reserves an estimated amount of total 266 trillion cubic feet gas reserves. However, in

2014 the China began to drill for oil in disputed waters region nearby the Vietnam. According to some studies this body of water holds 1/3rd of the entire world's marine bio-diversity, thereby making it a very crucial area in the perspective of eco-system. However, China's energy demand is continuously growing and it may increase very dangerously in future. That is why; it may be a major cause of security concerns in South-China Sea for the other regional maritime powers.

It is obvious to say that fishing is a very big business in this region which indicates that 10 percent of the world's total fishing business. However, the fish stocks in this area are depleting and some countries have banned this business as a means of asserting their sovereignty claims. Nevertheless, some of the maritime powers have not banned and fishing vessels are becoming a source of conflicts. In 2012, the Philippines navy discovered a Chinese vessel engaged in illegal fishing in the area. Before the Philippines could take

any action to Chinese surveillance ships came to the aid of the vessel and blocked access to the shoal. Thus, the China has fiercely guarded the region and prohibited the access of non-Chinese boats. Therefore, it has been a major security concern for regional maritime powers.

South-China Sea is regarded as a major route of Indo-Pacific region. More than half of the globe's total annual merchant fleet tonnage passes through these choke points and the oil transported through the Malacca Strait from the Indian Ocean en-routes to East-Asia through the South-China Sea, which is a triple amount that passes through the Suez Canal and fifteen times that of Panama Canal.

Thus security concerns in South-China Sea are observed as land reclamation, freedom of navigation, militarization of the area, piracy, illegal trafficking etc. If we talk about the key term '*land reclamation*', according to the U.S. Official in 2014-15 China's land reclamation totaled twelve square

kilometers. However, it is a misleading statement because none of the feature occupied by the China are only islands. China's occupied features have not lost land due to erosion by wind or water. China is dredging sand from the seabed and coral reefs to fill in low-tide elevations by pouring concrete over this mass to create artificial islands. Moreover, China is recovering soil from islands that have been eroded. Actually an island under International Law is entitled to a twelve nautical miles territorial sea area and a 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zones.

The U.S. claims that it conducts freedom of navigation, operational patrols to challenge excessive and illegal claims to maritime space than is allowed by International law but China has not legally declared any official base line around any of its occupied features nor has China delineated a 12 nautical miles territorial sea around any of its artificial islands. In fact, China claims an ambitious military or security alert zone around these islands. Thus, China's

assertion of control over the territorial waters creates security concerns in the South-China Sea for the maritime regional and global powers.

The most contentious issue of dispute in this region is that the China is militarizing this region through its construction of artificial islands that could serve as forward operating post for military aircraft and warships. China claims that it is necessary as its defensive measures its national interest and these measures will be determined by the level of threat that China have faced in the past. China argues that it has the right of self-defence. Moreover, it was only doing what other claimants or maritime powers had done by putting military personnel on its features to protect the infrastructure that it had built such as docks and air strips. China also charges that the U.S. has always been militarizing the South- China Sea by over flights by military aircrafts and by conducting patrols and exercises with naval warships. Actually both the China and the U.S. have never defined what

they mean by militarization. Nevertheless, this term include the following spectrum:

- To stationing uniformed armed military armed personnel in South-China Sea.
- To build bunkers and defensive guns emplacements.
- To construct dual use infrastructure such as docks, air strips, jetties, radar and communication equipments in the region.
- To place long range radar, signal intelligence and electronic warfare equipments.
- To deploy armed coast guard vessels, paramilitary fishing trawlers or aerial reconnaissance air craft armed with air to surface and anti submarine missiles, self-propelled artillery, anti-aircraft missiles, surface to surface missiles, amphibious craft and forces, naval war ships, cruise missiles, submarines, bombers and jet fighters in South-China Sea.

Confidence Building Measures in South

China Sea: However, this region has been a very controversial area for maritime powers which may be regional or global for a long time; but here it is an urgent need that some risk reduction measures and confidence building measures should be adopted to avoid the risk of instability in the region. For this purpose some of the measures are suggested as under:

- An agreement on a binding code of conduct is urgently required among all maritime powers.
- The process of cooperation should be developed through expanding ship visits, bilateral and multi-lateral exercises and enhanced counter piracy cooperation.
- All the maritime powers should promote cooperation in the field of energy and fisheries in South-China Sea.
- The creation of new dialogue mechanism such as South-China Sea Coast Guard Forum is urgently required.

- The U.S. should review its surveillance and its reconnaissance activities in the air and waters bordering China's territory of 12 nautical miles.
- The Military Maritime Consultative Agreement process should be made affective in this region.
- The U.S. should also clarify its respective dialogue with Manila and Hanoi to decrease the aggressiveness with China.

Conclusion: To conclude we can say that some strategic warning signals have indicated the risk of conflict in South-China Sea. However China and the U.S. have their own national interest in the Indo-Pacific water and South-China Sea. Moreover, China is the strongest claimant of its territorial interest and it does not allow free navigation in the region. That is why the strategic importance of the South-China Sea has been marked by the regional security concerned from the side of Regional Mari time powers. Therefore, in the

perspective of regional security concerns, the Indo-Pacific region including the South China Sea should be moved towards the peace and stability and all the maritime power should promote and enhanced the confidence building measures as suggested in the research paper.

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