

FOREIGN STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY CHINA TOWARDS PHILIPPINES ON DISPUTE OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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Abstract: *The disputes over South China sea are issues that have continuously irritated China prompting it to respond in various ways like for example carefully reacting through its foreign strategies, and one of the countries that have been at logger heads with China in modern times with regard to South China sea is the Philippines. Therefore, this article intends to react to two vibrant questions: what is China's foreign policy towards the South China Sea? Second, how has the maritime matter question been handled in the China-Philippines relations particularly with regards to their territorial dispute? The international relations between China and the Philippines offers a perfect benchmark of how China has sensitively handled its foreign policy to react to the South China Sea question. For that reason, the article will analyze China's strategies on the Philippines from three main aspects: China's foreign policy towards the South China Sea, the maritime issues' situations as well as the relations between China and the Philippines under this territorial dispute. The economic power reflects most of a nation's strength, as a result, China's rising economic power is serving as an essential element in shaping China-Philippines relations. Could this really be true?*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the South China Sea disagreements, a huge amount of writings has been published and discussed globally. Three expositive factors originated from previous literature have potentially influenced China's varying passivity behaviours in the South China Sea disputes: Key principles and interests of China, the rise of China and external influence on China's behaviours. In the contemporary world, whether domestic security or regional peace depends profoundly on nations' competences to dwell in certain territories with high efficiency. A country can be able to extend its exclusive economic Zone and gains more fishing rights and other maritime resources through these occupations. As a matter of fact, the high level of economic performance and independence can have a great impact on the nation's foreign political decisions such as the controversy over territories.

2. CHINA'S STRATEGIES TOWARDS SOUTH CHINA SEA

In this perspective, the aim of China's strategy is to reinforce her claims, to enhance its maritime rights across these water zones (Fravel 2011). Most importantly, China aims at ensuring to deter other states from occupying certain resource development projects without her participation. Since the mid-2000s, various methods such as diplomatic negotiations, administrative and military means have been extensively utilized by the government of China. Specifically, China's approach is largely about deferring the process of the resolution with efforts to avert widespread strains.

Currently, the basis of China's territorial policy is largely based on Chinese former premier Zhou Enlai's statement concerning Allied peace treaty negotiations with Japan in

August 1951, where he asserted China's inborn sovereignty towards the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Subsequently, after seven years of such claims, China affirmed its claims over these islands again, thus combining its assertion with maritime rights. Consequently, a similar formal statement has been declared with regard to the same question of China's territorial sovereignty over these areas, for instance; "*China has indisputable sovereignty over the Spratly Islands (or South China Sea islands) and adjacent waters*" (Raditio, 2018, p.52 & O'Neill, 2018. p.4)

Equally, in 1992 a law concerning the territorial sea and the contiguous zone of China was approved by the National People Congress offering a more comprehensive description of the 1958 declaration. And as a follow-up, on 15th of May 1996, China declared its boundaries for its maritime areas. These borders encompassed China's mainland as well as the Paracel Islands. And on 21st January 1998, another law called Law on the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf of the People's Republic of China was announced. Other than the law in 1992, the EEZ law did not specifically relate to the Spratly Islands or the Paracel Islands. However, together with the 1992 law, those laws served as a basis for China's declaration of its maritime rights on territorial seas.

3. CHINA'S RAISING INTEREST IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

Why the interest in South China Sea Maritime Issues? It should be first understood that after the end of the Second World War, problems regarding the ocean became one of the key concerns in the international system. One of the reasons is that this phenomenon can be ascribed to sovereign states' rising attention upon the potential economic value of oceans (Buzan, 1978). From this perspective, this accounts for the reasons behind the global tense competition over rare marine organisms or sources. In order to resolve disputes overseas, an international legal frame called the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention was constructed in response to this challenge. Serving as an international agreement towards nations' rights and responsibilities concerning their utilization of oceans, it also created guidelines for the management of natural resources as well as world maritime trade guidelines.

Consequently, the function of this treaty was geared towards 'defining the terms of disorder' (Buzan, 1978). It would be very possible that there will occur a mixture of political conflicts and cooperation in the future. Therefore, the resolution on disputes depends much on the balance between the cost of conflicts and the benefits through trades. In the Asia-Pacific region, provoked by nationalism or large economic benefits, these maritime issues had become the major focus of coastal countries in both Northeast and Southeast Asia.

In recent decades, China has been involved in territorial issues with some Southeast Asian countries and Japan towards maritime demarcations as well as the peripheral islands. As is known to all, the name "South China Sea" is given due to the geographical location of the sea areas rather than the political ownership. Therefore, gaining control of these islands is the key assurance for maritime resource exploitation (Yee, 2011). And it could also help the security of regional naval power to be guaranteed.

The escalation of disputes has drawn great attention to the potential possibility of maritime conflicts between the concerned countries. In 2010, Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State by then, put forward the idea that US had its national interest over freedom of navigation and US's support for "a collaborative diplomatic process" to resolve the disputes. This idea contrast with China's statement with regard to the South China Sea as a nation's core benefit. Since then, this 'regional' maritime issue has been pushed on an international dispute resolution stage. It is believed that there are three main factors urging a conflict and also deciding the possibility of extension in disputes; Energy, Territory and Power (Yee, 2011).

4. THE ANALYTICAL CONTEXT OF THE SOUTH CHINA SEA MARITIME QUESTION.

To understand a combination of the initiation, prolongation as well as the settlement of the maritime disputes, seeking out a way to devise a theoretical framework concerning domestic politics and international relations must be taken into consideration. Robert Putnam put forward "two-level" games aiming to look for possible factors from both internal and international levels, he also attempted to verify the interactions between these variables (Putnam, 1993). The core of this political model is "negotiation" towards international conflict. Around the G7 summits between 1976 and 1979, Putnam found out the qualitative change in negotiation works through the research. Under domestic negotiations, the chief negotiator took social actors into consideration and constructs connection within. Concerning international negotiations, the chief negotiator made efforts to fight for his country's interests to the largest extent among those possible benefits. In support of his arguments, he stated that; *"to seek the possible 'wins' among his country's 'win-set'"*.

Another mechanism to ascertain the four different aspects of territorial disputes contains assumptive, legalistic, structural as well as material approaches. Concerning the school of assumptive means, it emphasizes the strong influence of nationalist sentiments between ideational stages on policymakers towards decision-making for sovereignty problems (Deans, 2000). The second school of legalistic approach defends that maritime cooperation reducing trade expenses and boosting agreements may help improve harmonious relationships between states. One country's interests may not only rely on power distribution or valuable resources within cooperation but also mutual benefits (Valencia, 2000). At this point, the maritime disputes can be relatively easy to be resolved. When the structural approach is being taken into consideration, it is believed that countries with great power gap are more possible to reach an agreement while symmetrical countries like China and Japan can be less likely to reach a compromise successfully (Lee & Kim, 2008). However, the efficiency of this approach is still debatable. In my opinion, the differences in the power level of China and the Philippines cannot easily be applied as a successful case for the "structural approach" dimension of the conflicts. Eventually, in regard to material approach, it is believed that the increasing rate of resource demands from especially China may result in the extension of conflicts (Kenny, 2004). Understandably, the above mechanism has offered us a clear version of factors from various levels of analysis.

To analyze the East and South China Seas situations from a historical perspective, Yee (2011) chose to apply Reiter (2003)'s bargaining model of war. This bargaining model gives a general structure of war through a bargaining process: from the background causes to midway development and finally the consequences after the war. It considers the nature of war as the controversy over resource distribution. Nevertheless, much of the possibilities to start a war depend on both sides' expected outcome from the war as well as their disabilities to avoid a war in the future (Reiter, 2003). Therefore, the major issue of this model is the intangibility of disputants' capabilities to solve the problems. In summary, this framework reflects the previous violent conflicts, along with current relative balanced power relationship brings about today's stable situation in the South China Sea.

On one hand, in realists' opinions of the disputes, states are viewed as elements existing in the global system of chaos. This means that realists believe that nations can only depend on themselves under this disorder atmosphere. Military power and resources superiority are the key determinants shaping mutual relations in this international game. On the other hand, as stated before, from some pessimistic realists' perspectives, the top issues in the South China Sea disputes are the high-speed industrialization of China and concurrent competition of states over sources supplementary for their industries (Kenny, 2004).

In my own analysis, I believe these maritime issues involving regional nation-states could be explained through the rapid development of both economic and high technology aspects in South East Asia region, especially the rising superpower like China. This is because since the beginning of Chinese economic reform in December 1978, its GDP has continuously increased by around 7 percent annually, and it even went beyond Japan to be the second-largest world economic entity in 2011(Shucheng,2017. p.141). The large needs for modernizing China's military forces and for enhancing the influence of its economy serve as the cornerstone of China claiming for territorial areas rich in raw materials. To stabilize its economy, it is a must for China to guarantee its external resources. However, the ongoing sovereignty disagreements between China and its neighbour countries are not the sole problems for Beijing political leaders. The South China disputes, to some extent, revolve around China's developing process along with proving its abilities to defend national interests and territorial lands.

5. INTERNATIONAL DEBATES IN CONTEXT REGARDING THIS QUESTION

The long-lasting disputes on the South China Sea between China and neighbouring nations especially the Philippines has attracted international concerns towards world peace issues. As a matter of fact, conflicts over "maritime entitlements" has been one of the most disconcerting problems affecting the relations between China and the Philippines. China, Vietnam and Taiwan claim all the coastal islands in the South China Sea while the Philippines and Malaysia assert some of them. Their claims or interests coincide and as a result, leading to several glitches. Generally, according to International Hydrographic Organization, the South China Sea is located in the South of China, East of Vietnam, West of the Philippines and North of the Bangka Belitung Islands and Borneo. And basing on

statistics from CIA factbook in 2014, the South China Sea is defined as lying between four degrees and eleven degrees north latitude, 109 degrees and 117 degrees east of longitude.

Approximately, there are around 100-230 islands around the South China Sea area. Nevertheless, most of the islands have been proved to be scientifically unfit to support human lives. From my point of view, the reasons behind disputes between China and neighbouring countries especially the Philippines can be summarized into two main aspects: political, economic and social significance.

Regarding the political significance; there is no doubt that the South China Sea is a flashing point in world politics. The United States interferes with a goal of calling for “freedom of navigation” while its real purpose is to prevent China’s hegemony in East Asia. From the perspective of the United States, China’s maritime policies under President Xi Jinping’s “the Belt and Road Initiative” are long-range hidden challenges for US’s leading world order. In a nutshell, the effects of territorial disputes in the South China Sea has given rise to two directions: One is an ideal peaceful coexistence of both China and the United States. And the other direction is China overthrowing US’s established order and take the US’s role in this region.

In addition, economic significance cannot be underestimated. Three prominent reasons can be applied to explain the economic benefits of the South China Sea. First, due to the location, these islets are believed to have a great amount of deposits of natural gas, oil and minerals under the ocean. Second, there exist a number of rare maritime species near the islands. Third, the South China Sea is viewed as the second busiest international maritime transportation centre as thousands of ships passing through the sea lane every day (Mark, 2014). Hence, its essential geopolitical position is considered to be contributing to the source of the conflicts.

Between 1980 and 1990, there was no conspicuous military conflict between China and the Philippines as the Philippines was suffering from the attacks by Vietnam. Later on, in 1992, China began its sovereignty claims on Spratly islands but it was restrained by ASEAN countries. Three years later, China built initial structures in Mischief Reef, an atoll located in the east of the Spratly Islands which has been occupied by the Philippines. The Philippines government with some other Southeast Asian countries started a protest against China’s behaviours. Nevertheless, China officially explained that these facilities were built to serve as shelters for fishermen. Still, in 1995, Chinese armies occupied Mischief Reef. This act extended the scale of territorial conflicts between China and the Philippines while it did not enrage the Philippines to take military measures. Instead, Manila began a protest through diplomatic approach: The Philippines prosecuted China’s actions in the World Maritime Tribunal. But China refused this challenge at last. At the beginning of the 21st century, China became less antagonistic due to its new foreign policy on “China’s peaceful rise”. At the same time, in 2002, China negotiated with ASEAN countries on the topic of establishing free trade zone, and also the agreement and implementation of the “Code of Conduct on the South China Sea”. This code is produced to reduce the possibilities of armed conflicts around the Spratly Islands by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is the importance that

nations concerned reached an agreement to solve the territorial problem with no use of military power in the future (Baker, 2004).

On account of China's rapidly increasing economic strength, the ASEAN countries try their best to avoid a head-on confrontation with China in both diplomatic and military aspect. To resolve the sovereignty claims problem, the ASEAN claimants chose to deal with this issue through Joint Resources Development, Confidence and Building Measures (Joyner, 1999). Under this approach, these nations' joint ventures would be able to exploit natural resources in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, it is guaranteed by the "Spratly Resource Development Authority" that no territorial claims will be taken for granted. And countries need to cooperate with each other in order to form a harmonious atmosphere and realize the goal of this approach.

The relations between the Philippines and China are usually viewed as more on diplomatic and continuously shaped by the jurisdictional claim on those islands. And as mentioned earlier, since these territorial disputes are among a few countries, the situation is quite complicated. Although the disputes take place in such a situation, the relationship between China and the Philippines transformed from almost military confrontation to recent cooperation with confidence-building measures. The essence of confidence-building measures aims at ensuring that a concrete relationship can be maintained within claimant countries rather than one dominating another with violence. It is vital for countries to trust each other and understand others' intentions as well as the logic behind relevant national policies (Joyner, 1999). With the efficient practices of these "building measures", relations between China and the Philippines have significantly improved. Manila perceived China as one of the major players in the world economy that can further boost the economic development of the Philippines. The increasing economic relations has tightened the connections of both countries leading the two parties to focus on diplomatic emphasis concerning the Spratly Islands to enhance trade and economy cooperation. Besides, China ensured that the other South Asian countries do not perceive its increasing power as being a threat to regional peace. Simultaneously, China almost became less worried about the US's interference in relations between China and the Philippines after the US retreating its armies in Iraq in 2004. Therefore, China and the Philippines have experienced a mass turn from initial conflicts concerning the South China Sea to harmonious economic cooperation.

6. CRITICISMS

The extent of China's claims is reflected as "ambiguous" (Fravel 2011). This is because in the first place, many land features among the South China Sea declared by Chinese official government cannot be perceived as islands by the UNCLOS and as a result, these places cannot be the foundation of China's EEZ law. The second ambiguity point is related to China's historic waters. Even though it is suggested by some Chinese political researchers that China has the historical rights to claim the South China Sea, the EEZ law did not specify the so-called historic rights. The third aspect concerns the "nine-dashed line" which cannot be easily underestimated. In Chinese, it is translated to "Jiu Duan Xian". This line initially appeared in the official Republic of China map in 1947, and then have been

drawn in the People's Republic China maps since 1949. So far, China has never given a clear identification of the line's political function in an international stage. If people infer this line's definition superficially, it may stand for China's claims to the islands and maritime rights within the line. The vague line offers space for the certain institution to give interpretations from their perspectives. For example, the PLA official newspaper regarded this line as China's "traditional maritime boundary."

One state could follow one out of three basic strategies as a means to cope with its sovereignty claims (Fravel 2011). The first strategy is "cooperation". With no use of force, this approach contains offering or shifting the command of the highly controversial lands. Secondly, a state can also implement the strategy of "escalation". Under this circumstance, the state could choose to use compulsive negotiation to acquire its prospective satisfying outcome. In other words, the nation may resort to violence in order to control the contested land. The third strategy is universally referred to as "delaying" which is based on one country pursuing its original claims. A great number of literature related to territorial disputes examine the various stages of the first two strategies: cooperation and escalation. If countries pursue these two approaches, then it would not be hard to indicate when military conflict may break out or how the conflicts may be ended in a peaceful way. The third strategy is usually applied by countries when it comes to territorial problems, much as the reasons behind their choice may vary.

For weaker states, they utilize the "delaying" tactics in order to gain more time for preparing stronger military forces and making their positions more stable. At the same time, the delaying strategy can be viewed as a solution for a tough dispute. In addition, through delaying approach, a state can reinforce its strengths towards the control of territorial areas. A state can consolidate its sovereignty claims in the international judicial system by occupying territories for a period of time (Fravel, 2011).

Beijing has been effectively pursuing the delaying strategy to establishing as well as maintaining China's influence in the South China Sea since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Chinese troops occupied Yong Xing Island in 1950 but did not take up other parts at the east of Crescent Group, but still operate there very often. In 1959, South Vietnam started to take control of the Crescent Group and detained Chinese fishermen. And from 1960 to 1973, China kept sending approximately five patrols around the Paracel Islands every year.

The Chinese government has preserved its delaying strategy against South Vietnam government until 1974. This event is an obvious reflection of China's delaying strategy.

When people are debating about China's rising status and its influence in US-led security order in both South and East Asia, two main theories are being discussed quite often: Realism and Liberalism. In short, optimistic liberals focus on China's economy and its interaction with other economic entities regionally. They believe that through these mutual effects, China would eventually follow the rules of the international system and reach a political liberalization. To the contrary, most realists insist on their stances on the varying power dynamics. They point out that China will become more peremptory with its strength

developing. By then, the United States should be ready for the challenges that China brings to the rights of regional domination. As mentioned earlier, the great and rapid development of China is viewed as not only a threat to regional peace around the South China Sea area but also a giant challenge to US-established global security order. Debates between liberalists and realists are playing a role in influencing the understandings of the development of China and its global effects.

However, there are also some other views about the rise of China. For instance, some realists doubt the “inevitability” of a war resulting from China’s rise. Meanwhile, some pessimistic liberalists forecast a future full of ideological conflicts and the potential atmosphere of mistrust between the United States and China. It is difficult to conclude which theory or side can describe causes of the disputes perfectly, but the intertwined logic behind these helps to contribute to a clearer understanding of the reality of China’s increasing impacts in Asia region and the future of South China Sea disputes.

7. CONCLUSION

With a large amount of scarce natural resources and maritime species deep in the ocean, the South China Sea disputes are undoubtedly the key issues attracting attention globally. After gaining a comprehensive understanding of major principles and core interests of China, effects of the rapid development of China and other superpower’s impacts on China’s behaviours, it makes the shift of relations between China and the Philippines easier to be understood. The economic power reflects most of a nation’s strength, as a result, China’s economic power serves as an essential element in shaping China-Philippines relations. Meanwhile, the rise of China since the late 20th century has affected the world power flow direction and shifted the international order. Nevertheless, China and the Philippines have experienced a mass turn from initial sovereignty conflicts to harmonious economic cooperation in modern times. And this has largely been due to the changing Chinese foreign strategies towards its neighbours particularly with regard to the South China Sea question.

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