

THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

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Abstract

Maritime disputes involving contests over the control of islands, reefs, atolls, cays, marine and sea based resources have become an increasingly important concern in Southeast and East Asia. The states in the Asia Pacific have a distinctly strong maritime orientation, as this is a region encompassing a huge maritime area and overlapping maritime interests. The major threat to regional security in this region are maritime disputes which involve competing claims over islands, continental shelf, EEZ boundaries and other offshore resources. These territorial disputes if not timely resolved can evolve into serious threats that hinder regional stability and freedom of navigation. The unresolved South China issue has become a stumbling block to the establishment of peace and cordial inter-state relations in Southeast Asia. Furthermore this dispute is not just confined between the claimants, but the United States is also using this dispute as a platform to stage its comeback in the Asia- Pacific region.

Keywords: South China Sea dispute, China, Vietnam, United States, ASEAN, Asia Pivot Policy, Southeast Asia

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Introduction

Maritime issues are emerging as a matter of grave concern in the international security environment. After the scramble for occupation over the land resources, now the attention has turned towards the oceanic resources. According to Barry Buzan, oceans have “become areas of intense competition for scarce goods.” (Andy Yee 2011). He further goes on to say, after the end of the Cold War, disputes between states take place for competition over access to vital resources like oil and natural gas, and not for differences along ideological lines. The international legal framework, namely the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas will not be successful in creating order as it will be difficult to get the countries to abide by its legal obligations. This can be clearly seen in the case of the South China Sea dispute, where the main concern is the demarcation of maritime boundaries between the states. If the boundary delimitation or demarcation problem is taken care of then the sovereignty dispute will automatically be resolved. Eventually the fight for exploitation of resources will also dilute to some extent, as exploitation of the resources in the sea could be carried out following the international convention on the high seas and territorial waters. There will be certain level of cooperation and conflict in the future. Conflicting interests would somehow be counter balanced by the considerations of trade, development and the cost of disputes. (Andy Yee 2011)

Buzan’s observation provides the basis for critically examining the situation in the Asia Pacific region, where maritime issues are becoming a key concern. China’s economic and military rise has made her involved in territorial disputes with nearly all the countries of Southeast Asia over maritime delimitations and sovereignty of offshore islands, namely the Spratly and the Paracel Islands. Control over these islands would guarantee the rights of resource exploitation, control of the sea lines of communication and regional naval power projection. Confrontation rather than cooperation marks the history of the South China Sea dispute and hence the dispute acts as a major irritant in the bilateral and multilateral relations in the Southeast and East Asian region.

The United States and Southeast Asia

The Asia Pacific region has always been viewed as one of the most important regions in the U.S. foreign policy. Peace and stability in East Asia and the Pacific is a fundamental prerequisite of the United States security. The U.S.’ renewed interest and attention in this region is clearly spelt

out in the Obama administration's 'Asia Pivot' policy. Due to the U.S' whole focus being devoted to the Middle East, this region was to some extent ignored by the U.S. This opportunity was utilised by China, who on the one hand improved its relations with the Southeast Asian neighbours mainly through its economic manoeuvre (a part of its 'soft power' strategy), like the ASEAN-China FTA, not devaluing its currency during the 1997 financial crisis etc and on the other hand showing its military and naval strength through its policy of "creeping assertiveness" in the South China Sea. To make its presence felt in this region again and also to counter the rise of China, the Obama Administration announced the "Asia Pivot" policy and is taking a lot of interest in the South China Sea dispute in recent years.

Nearly one-half of the world's people live in countries bordering the Asia-Pacific region, and it is home to over half of all economic activity in the world. Four of the world's major powers occupy Northeast Asia and some of the most strategically important waterways flow through Southeast Asia. The United States is as much a Pacific nation as an Atlantic one. The United States maintains a sizeable military presence in the region in an effort to preserve stability and deter future conflicts. Roughly 100,000 forward-deployed forces, and a network of mutual security alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand form the bedrock of United States regional security policy. (Michael W. Wing 2001)

The Cold War had led to major changes in the U.S. foreign policy. Washington would honour its treaty commitments and provide military and economic assistance, but henceforth the U.S. expected its allies to take care of their own defence. Its policy towards Southeast Asia after its departure from Vietnam in 1975 has been aptly characterised by Diane K. Mauzy and Brian L. Job (2007) as "benign neglect and missed opportunities." (Diane K. Mauzy and Brian L. Job 2007: 622-623)

But this policy radically altered after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Arrests in Singapore of members of the Jemmah Is- lamiyah revealed the existence of an al-Qaeda-linked terrorist network in Southeast Asia intent on targeting Western interests. This made the Bush administration name Southeast Asia as the "second front" of terrorism. By signing the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with Manila and execution of 'Exercise Balikatan' in 2002 in the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao Washington again reinforced its position in the region, which it had rescinded since its humiliation in the 1975 Vietnam War. The return of the U.S.

once again in the Asia Pacific region was welcomed by U.S. allies in the region, including a majority of ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia and South Korea. The signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of ASEAN by the U.S. at the ASEAN Regional Forum Meeting held at Hanoi on 23 July, 2010, was actually prompted by China's official announcement that the South China Sea is a part of its "core interest", which clearly implied that it was not ruling out the use of force in the region. (Tridib Chakraborti and Mohor Chakraborty 2011: 225-226) The then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton represented the U.S. in the 17th ASEAN Summit held in Hanoi in October 2010. This marked the U.S. participation, for the first time ever, in the East Asia Summit (EAS). Combined with an announced policy of engagement with Burma, the declaration of a Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), and a clear statement on U.S. interests in the South China Sea in July 2010, it is fair to say that never has the U.S. been so peacefully, fully, and visibly active in the Southeast Asia region. (Satu Limaye 2010) In 2011, the Obama administration announced that the U.S. needed to make "a strategic pivot" in its foreign policy, where over the next decade the dynamic will be to downsize the United States' presence in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and to invest more and pay greater attention to the Asia-Pacific, particularly Southeast Asia. (John J. Brandon 2012)

The Genesis of the South China Sea Dispute

The South China Sea (SCS) is a large semi-enclosed marginal ocean basin with a total area of 3.5 million square kilometres and an average depth of over 2000 meters. The South China Sea contains four archipelagos: the Dongsha Islands (Pratas), Zhongsha Islands (Macclesfield Bank), Xisha Islands (Paracels), and Nansha Islands (Spratlys). The South China Sea is bordered by the East China Sea to the northeast, the Pacific Ocean and Sulu Sea to the east, and the Java Sea and Indian Ocean to the southwest. Lying between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the South China Sea serves the function of a "maritime super highway" and "vital international passage." The South China Sea is one of the world's most important and densely used routes for international navigation. The states bordering the South China Sea vary greatly in size, geography, social and cultural structures, and economic and political systems. Many of the states have contesting claims to different parts of the SCS, particularly islands. (Guifang (Julia) Xue 2012: 307) The states competing for claims of sovereignty are the People's Republic of China ((PRC) or China), Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam – countries that are vastly different from one another, in land size, population, per capita income, and political

systems. Due to the number of claimants, the complexity of the claims and the wide range of interests involved, the South China Sea has been called the “mother of all territorial disputes.” Confrontations rather than cooperation marks its history and the disputes act as a major irritant in bilateral and multilateral relations in the region. In the post-Cold War era it is often believed to be one of the most volatile hot spots. (Erik Beukel 2010: 9)

Of the disputed claims, the status of the Spratlys has been the most contentious and has resulted in several military clashes in the past forty years, particularly between China and Vietnam. The international Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) regime has intensified these claims, making the disputes, and therefore the solutions, more complex and demanding. Bordered by the world’s rapidly industrializing countries and growing economies, the South China Sea also functions as a central component of the Southeast Asian and world economies. The South China Sea natural resources are of significance both globally and worldwide. Accordingly, ongoing disputes and competition over resources in the South China Sea have attracted global attention in the past decades. (Guifang (Julia) Xue 2012: 307-309) To the United States as the dominant Western power with a critical interest in the regional order in East Asia, the principle of freedom of navigation through all sea-lanes is all-important. In East Asia, especially Japan, but also South Korea, has a profound interest that a potentially unfriendly power does not dominate the area. More than a quarter of the world’s trade traverses through the South China Sea, including 70% of Japan’s energy needs and 65% of China’s. The South China Sea is the world’s second busiest international sea-lane and constitutes “a major communications hub” and the country that controls it will be a major maritime power in East Asia. Not only Japan and other regional powers, but also the United States as the global superpower, are closely watching China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea; whilst they maintain strict neutrality on the sovereignty substance of the disputes, any threat to free shipping by littoral countries, terrorists, or pirates will be met with a strong reaction, not only from America, but also from Japan. (Erik Beukel 2010: 9)

Because the South China Sea extends across tropical and semi-tropical zones with a typical monsoon climate, the South China Sea has a large and complex marine ecosystem and an abundant variety of resources. This has attracted coastal states to develop fisheries industries. Among coastal states bordering the South China Sea, China harvests the largest quantity of fish. Because of the population of its coastal provinces, the fishing grounds of the South China Sea

are an important part of China's fisheries. The South China Sea is also rich in oil and gas. The abundance of vital resources is one of the most important considerations sparking the territorial disputes. The intensified competition for South China Sea resources has seen a rise in the number of disputes. Although the South China Sea was long considered a potential trouble spot, a military clash between China and one of its neighbours did not occur until the 1970s. These disputes, mixed with overlapping territorial claims, have resulted in numerous clashes like the clash between China and Vietnam over the Paracels in 1974 (In 1974, China and the then South Vietnamese government clashed over the Paracels. The Chinese were already occupying the eastern part, while South Vietnam occupied the western part, and after the clash China has controlled the whole of the Paracels), another clash in 1988 over the Spratlys between China and Vietnam took place, now in the western part of the Spratlys and the third clash between China and the Philippines in 1995 over the Mischief Reef. As a consequence, the South China Sea has become a site of tension with the potential for greater conflict. This has made access to South China Sea waters problematic and dangerous. (Guifang (Julia) Xue 2012: 309-310)

Over the decades, the South China Sea has drawn global attention not only for its strategic location, resource competition, and security considerations, but also for its multiple sovereignty and maritime jurisdictional disputes. Until 1958, there were no sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. Since the 1960s, with the creation of an international law of the sea regime by four Geneva Conventions, disputes over insular features started to emerge, causing stress between relevant states. When UNCLOS' negotiation began in the 1970s, it increased these stresses, and some states started to make claims and take unilateral actions to control the features near their coast. Since the 1970s, China's maritime neighbours have taken control over some of the Spratlys features. When UNCLOS was signed in 1982 and entered into force in 1994, South China Sea disputes were irrevocably intensified. Six claims are presently asserted to the South China Sea islands or waters. China and Taiwan both claim sovereignty over the four groups of insular features—an area enclosed by a U-Shaped Line based on discovery, historical usage, and effective occupation and control. China controls the Paracels and seven features of the Spratlys. Taiwan controls the Pratas, the largest archipelago in the South China Sea, and Taiping Island (Itu Aba), the largest island in the Spratlys. The Chinese claims have been challenged by other South China Sea coastal states making similar claims based on EEZ and continental shelf principles established by UNCLOS. Far more prominent has been the long-simmering dispute

between China and Vietnam over both the Paracels (Hoang Sa in Vietnamese) and Spratlys (Truong Sa in Vietnamese). Vietnam claims that it discovered and has actively ruled over both since the seventeenth century, and currently controls twenty-one features of the latter. Vietnam hotly disputes China's historical account, and insists that China never claimed sovereignty over the islands until the 1940s, although it officially recognized the sovereignty claim to the four South China Sea archipelagos by the Chinese government in 1958. The Philippines maintains separate claims to a portion of the Spratlys and controls eight of them, known as the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), based on discovery, occupation, and geo-proximity. Malaysia lays its claim over certain parts of the Spratly islands and reefs also on geo-proximity and controls eight islands that fall within its continental shelf. Brunei claims two reefs and a maritime zone based on natural prolongation of its continental shelf. Among the numerous territorial disputes, the Spratlys dispute is probably the most serious to date. The Spratlys are a group of small islands, reefs and atolls, cays, shoals, and sandbars in the South China Sea believed to be sitting atop vast oil and gas reserves. These disputes mainly concern the ownership of some mid-ocean islets of the Spratlys, most of which are reefs without much value in themselves, but the owner of the Spratlys islets will be entitled to sovereign rights in a number of maritime zones, and natural resources may be developed from the offshore waters of the islets. None of these islets had been inhabited historically, but in the recent half century the competing claimants, except Brunei, have built up structures and garrisoned most of their controlling features. Another appealing feature of ownership over the Spratlys is the sea lane between the archipelagos is the major route that links East Asia with Africa and Europe. The fact that the competing claims of several states overlap makes the situation more difficult than relatively simple bilateral disputes. The issue is further complicated by the expansion of the dispute in recent years to include boundary delimitation, entitlement of islands and rocks, navigational freedoms, and military activities involving states from outside the region. Besides a host of disputes and competition, the South China Sea is presently facing problems of security challenges and dreadful conditions of state relations. It is difficult to reach any consensus with such a complex situation. (Guifang (Julia) Xue 2012: 307-312)

Figure 1.1 **The disputed South China Sea and the claims.**



Source: <http://i44.tinypic.com/24f0808.jpg>

The U.S. Policy Towards The South China Sea Dispute: From An Attitude Of Neutrality To Active Concern

The South China Sea dispute is one of the most heated issues in the Asia Pacific region. It not only involves a large number of claimants but also a few international players are getting associated with the dispute, like the U.S., India. China's aggressive policies, its naming the South China Sea as its 'core interest' has made it clear that it is not excluding the use of force if needed. This attitude of China and its military modernisation programme- substantial modernization of its maritime paramilitary forces as well as naval capabilities has even put the U.S. government in a dilemma, at the same time, it is developing capabilities that would put the U.S. forces in the region at risk in a conflict, thus potentially denying access to the U.S. Navy in the western Pacific. If China gets control of the South China Sea the U.S. may have to

compromise on its freedom of navigation, especially over the right of U.S. military vessels to operate in China's two-hundred-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The South China Sea and the Scarborough Shoal dispute has even provided a platform for the U.S. to stage its comeback in this region, and by trying to help out its allies like the Philippines militarily the U.S. has also been able to develop a trust in the mind of the other Southeast Asian countries. Given the growing importance of the U.S.-China relationship, and the Asia-Pacific region more generally, to the global economy, the United States has a major interest in preventing any one of the various disputes in the South China Sea from escalating militarily.

The American attitude to the South China Sea has been very neutral in the past. In the wake of the Paracel clash in January 1974, the U.S. State Department said that the South China Sea disputes were 'for the claimants to settle among themselves'. In his annual report to Congress, then U.S. Defence Secretary Harold Brown hardly mentioned the South China Sea except in the context of Soviet interests in Cam Ranh Bay and Danang. This was also the case with Admiral William J. Crowe, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, in an interview in 1984. His concern was with the growing Soviet presence in Cam Ranh Bay and how that gave the Russians the ability to interdict the sea lines of communication in the South China Sea. (Ang Cheng Guan 2000: 207) In March 1988, the Chinese and Vietnamese ships exchanged fire in the waters near Chigua Reef (Johnson Reef) of the Spratly Islands. One year afterwards, a Spratly Front Line headquarters was established by China to command patrolling mission in the Spratlys/ South China Sea area. This was the beginning of the PRC military presence in the Spratly Islands. The Reagan Administration's policy was that the United States took no position on the merits of the competing claims in the Spratlys/ South China Sea area; that the United States supported a peaceful resolution of the disputes; and the U.S. opposed the use of threat or force. (Yann-heui Song 1997:324-325) In an interview in Malaysia in October 1991, Admiral Charles Larson, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, made the following points regarding the Spratlys: (a) the U.S. maintained a non-committal stance as there was no interest for the U.S. to intervene; (b) it was a regional issue and the U.S. had no contingency plan to go to the Spratlys in the event of a conflict; (c) it would be up to the countries concerned to work together and regional groupings (such as ASEAN) to find a solution; (d) the U.S. preferred that the claimants resolve the issue through political channels rather than by military means; and (e) if China and Vietnam became hostile in asserting their claims, the U.S. might work with

ASEAN, the Soviet Union and other nations under the auspices of the United Nations to ensure that the aggressor followed accepted international behaviour. (Ang Cheng Guan 2000: 207-208)

The U.S. still now takes no stand on the sovereignty claims, that is it does not support any country's claims in the disputed South China Sea. But from the time of the Bush Administration due to the rapid development of trade relation between the United States and the countries in the Asia Pacific region, maintaining its navigation right in the Spratlys/South China sea area has become one of the U.S' vital national interests. In addition due to the withdrawal of the U.S. military forces from the naval and air force bases in the Philippines and the withdrawal of the Soviet military forces from Vietnam, a power vacuum was believed to have been created in Southeast Asia, which made it likely for China to fill in the vacuum. If China emerged as a hegemonic power in the region, the countries in the area are concerned that it would not only threaten the security of the countries in Southeast Asia, but increase the possibility of Beijing's use of force to settle the territorial disputes in the Spratlys/South China Sea region. Recognising these potential problems the Bush Administration began to pay more attention to the development in the Spratlys and urged the claimant states to resort to peaceful means to settle their territorial disputes. (Yann-heui Song 1997: 325) During a World net dialogue with panellists from Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Jakarta and Tokyo, in March 1992, the U.S. Assistant Defence Secretary said that although the U.S. still had a formidable force in Asia despite its troop withdrawal from the Philippines, Washington had no specific commitment in the Spratlys. He also dismissed regional concerns that followed the Chinese National People's Congress passing the Territorial Law of the Sea, on 25 February, 1992 declaring its sovereignty over the Paracels and the Spratlys, effectively turning the South China Sea into a "Chinese Lake", saying that the move was just a reaffirmation of Beijing's long-term stance. He also mentioned that ASEAN could work with China to resolve the Spratlys row. The U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Frank Wisner, also said that the U.S. opposed the use of force to back any claims on the Spratlys and that there were limits to what the U.S. could do if fighting broke out over the area. Wisner added that he did not expect rivalry in the Spratlys to flare into the next flashpoint. According to the U.S. Undersecretary of State, Robert Zoellich, Washington's position on the South China Sea remained unchanged; that is, the U.S. would not make judgements on the merits of the claims, wanted freedom of navigation to be preserved and supported a peaceful resolution of the disputes. (Ang Cheng Guan 2000: 208)

Even when the Philippines, the U.S' erstwhile ally was embroiled in a clash over the Mischief Reef with China in 1995, the U.S. had not come to its aid, primarily because the U.S. had withdrawn its bases in 1992 from the Philippines, and though the MDT was still in force but the justification put forward was the Treaty of 1951 did not cover the Spratly disputes. Even if now the U.S. is taking an active interest in the dispute is not for the sake of its ally, but just for the fear of not having to compromise on its freedom of navigation in the disputed waters. But still after the 1995 clash there was a slight change in the U.S. attitude, according to Yann- Heui Song(1997), the U.S. policy started to move from a "non-involvement to limited-intervention" position.

The incident involving the harassment of the ocean surveillance vessel USNS Impeccable by Chinese navy and civilian patrol vessels south of Hainan Island in March 2009 caused serious concern in Washington. While Beijing claimed that the Impeccable was involved in marine scientific research in its exclusive economic zone that requires Chinese consent, Washington argued that the activities of the surveillance vessel were legitimate under the freedom of navigation principle. The U.S. position on the South China Sea has not fundamentally changed since the Impeccable incident. Washington is still not taking a position on the sovereignty dispute and it continues to limit its core interest to the freedom of navigation in the disputed waters. Still, the U.S. has become increasingly concerned over the rise of the Chinese naval capabilities and the uncertainty over China's commitment to the freedom of navigation principle in disputed waters. (Ralf Emmers 2012: 1)

At the 2010 Shangri-La Dialogue, U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates declared that while Washington does not take sides in the sovereignty disputes it would, however, oppose any action that could threaten the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. A statement made by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 2010 declaring that the U.S. has a national interest in the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea further angered China. (Ralf Emmers 2012:2) Clinton further said the United States was "prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence building measures" in the area, consistent with a 2002 agreement between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. The United States has since supported efforts by China's rival claimants to place the issue of the tensions in the

South China Sea on the discussion agenda for regional meetings, and publicly urged ASEAN and China to move forward with long-stalled negotiations over the text of a code of conduct. On August 3, 2012, the State Department criticized China's establishment of the new city and military garrison in the South China Sea, saying the moves “run counter to collaborative diplomatic efforts to resolve differences and risk further escalating tensions in the region.” The United States has also stepped up military cooperation with both the Philippines and Vietnam, in addition to announcing its policy of strategic rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific, which includes plans to increase the proportion of U.S. warships in the Asia Pacific from 50% to 60% of the U.S. fleet, and strengthen defence ties with many of China’s neighbours. (Lawrence V. Susan and MacDonald David 2012) Her comments were perceived by Beijing as a form of external interference. Clinton mentioned again the South China Sea at the ARF meeting in Bali in July 2011 where this time she encouraged ASEAN and China to conclude a code of conduct over the issue. President Obama himself raised the South China Sea question at the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali in November 2011. He restated that the U.S. takes no sides in the disputes but that its interests include the freedom of navigation and unimpeded international commerce in the semi-enclosed sea. Then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao responded by reaffirming the freedom of navigation principle and calling for a peaceful resolution of the South China Sea disputes. (Ralf Emmers 2012: 2)

The United States should and will continue to pursue a policy of “active neutrality” when it comes to taking sides in the competing sovereignty claims and uphold its rights to freedom of navigation in international waters. The United States is also in a strong position to provide technical expertise on interpreting UNCLOS and applying it to the South China Sea claims. It also has a treaty commitment to the Philippines, which does not cover disputed territories per se, but does cover Philippine forces and facilities. A failure of the U.S. to respond if an ally was threatened would have serious consequences for all U.S. credibility, so a U.S. response, while not assured, should be assumed. But the U.S. must be careful. China is increasingly suspicious of U.S. activity in the region and will no doubt respond negatively to any gesture that it considers an infringement upon its national sovereignty. While ASEAN is not as hostile to the U.S., it too is sensitive to the prerogatives of its member states and the institution as a whole. ASEAN also wants to avoid having to take sides in disputes between Washington and Beijing. This is seen as a lose-lose situation in Southeast Asia. As a result, the U.S. must walk a fine line. It should

support every effort to peacefully solve South China Sea disputes, but it should do so without getting directly involved. (Scott Snyder et al., 2001: 23-24)

Conclusion

Maritime disputes in Southeast Asia have acted as a platform for “big powers” like the United States, China, India to either showcase their dominance in the region as in the case of China, or to stage their come back in the region and to strengthen relations with the countries of the region as in the case of the United States or to play a role in the resolution of the dispute, ensuring of the freedom of the navigation in the conflicted seas and for the exploration of oil resources like in the case of India. The change in the United States’ attitude towards the South China Sea dispute not only spells out the rise of the Asian region and hence the desire of the U.S. to again gain its influence in the region, but has also made the South China Sea dispute more complex. Though the resolution of the dispute is desired by all, but the lingering of the dispute is the result of clashing opinions on the means of the resolution of the dispute. The rising number of maritime sovereignty disputes in Southeast and East Asia, such as the South China Sea, the Senkaku Island dispute between China and Japan, and presently the resurfacing of the Scarborough Shoal dispute has led to compromise in the peace and security of the region. Furthermore, these disputes are also having a negative impact on the working of the very successful regional association, the ASEAN. Timely resolution of the South China Sea dispute is imperative, be it through bilateral discussions or multilateral diplomacy to prevent the further hindrance of peace and tranquillity of the region.

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