



Towards a New U.S. Strategy in the South China Sea (and Asia)

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Please Note:

The views expressed today are my own.

Where To Start?

- Before we can talk about Asia and the South China Sea specifically we must discuss U.S. foreign policy goals today.
- We also need to talk about China's goals in the South China Sea.

Where Do We Want to Be? Asia!

- The goal of the Obama Administration back in 2011 was to Pivot or Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and/or Indo-Pacific region.
- Move away from the Middle East and withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Focus on trade and economic bright spots of the broader Indo-Pacific.
- And most importantly...focus on China.

A Great Plan...So What Happened?

- Sadly, domestic and global events halted the ability of the United States to effectively pivot to Asia (*some would argue this...and fair*).
- 1. **Domestic Politics**: Sequestration and Budget Showdown (no show to summits).
- 2. **The Rise of ISIS**:
- 3. **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Crimea**:
- 4. **The Red Line Dilemma/Broken Promises**:

While the World Turns...China Pushes Harder...Especially in the SCS

- Actions in East China Sea
- Various actions in South China Sea:
 - Scarborough Shoal (and soon to be reclaimed?)
 - Oil Rig Placements near Vietnam
 - Building Islands in the South China Sea...rapidly
 - Militarizing islands in the South China Sea...rapidly
 - Air fields, radar, runways, fighter aircraft and now anti-ship missiles.
 - More weapons and an ADIZ to come?

China's Military Rises

- Development of anti-access/area-denial military doctrine to keep U.S. forces out of Beijing's core interests...or pay a very steep price: DF-21D, Mines, Missiles, Subs, C4ISR
 - Taiwan, East China Sea, South China Sea and more broadly along the first island chain.
 - China's A2/AD capabilities, if spread to the South China Sea in large numbers could turn SCS into a no-go zone for U.S. Navy and aircraft in future.

Moving to South China Sea: What Is China's Goal

- Military Domination.
- Effective Sovereignty over SCS:
 - Enforcement of nine-dash-line claim.
 - Beijing would not kick all nations out of SCS or turn it into some sort of private lake, but it would be the dominant power and likely restrict military access to this area over time (USA).

Knowing China's Goals in SCS and U.S. Global Priorities...What Can U.S. Do in SCS?

- Knowing China is pushing aggressively in SCS and America has many global commitments that have taken away from pivot, what should Washington's strategy be?
- A great time for such a debate.
- It must be bold, asymmetric while not using lots of resources, not start a kinetic conflict, make China pay a price for its actions while preserving the status quo.

A Six Part Strategy to Halt Chinese Actions in SCS: The Foundation

- Start with a consistent, “top line” message that would be repeated over and over with singular clarity throughout the administration. It would enunciate clearly America’s main geopolitical aims and intentions in Asia. Something like the below would work well:
- *“America’s most important goal — that it shares with partners and allies across the Asia-Pacific and wider Indo-Pacific — is the maintenance of a peaceful and prosperous status-quo that ensures no one nation unilaterally coerces other countries or attempt to bend their will through coercive measures, turn near-seas or oceans into territory or use hostile acts to achieve its aims.”*
- **Put China on the defensive.**

Part 1: Lawfare

- **Part 1: “Lawfare” on Steroids-**
 - Either a joint action or multiple separate actions in an effort to take China to international courts.
 - Could be especially powerful if the Philippines was to win against China in its court case which is being decided soon.
 - Put China on the defensive by shaming them and winning the battle of global public opinion.

Part 2: Introducing “Shamefare”

- **Why not anytime any nation comes into interaction with China in the South China Sea film it and post it to Social Media or YouTube?**
 - Examples: U.S. FONOPS
 - Fishing Incidents
 - Coast Guard Interactions
 - Air to Air Engagements
 - If China is aggressive let the world see it.
 - Shame Beijing and win the global battle of public opinion.
 - Put China on the defensive.

Part 3: Turn A2/AD Against China:

- Sell anti-ship missiles to other South China Sea claimants.
- A possible example: Japanese anti-ship weapons to the Philippines, Vietnam and maybe even Indonesia if interested?
- Even if not possible now leaking the idea to the press would be a good place to start—get China nervous.
- But China on the defensive.

Part 4: The 'Greenpeace' Strategy

- China's has damaged huge sections of the South China's Sea and its natural ecosystem.
- Why doesn't the U.S. government speak out more on this issue and give environmental groups any satellite photos or intelligence it has to highlight the problem?
- Put China on the defensive, shame them and win the battle of global public opinion.

Part 5: Don't Respect China's 'Core Interests'

- If Beijing wants to raise the stakes in the South China Sea, it should know its actions will have repercussions across the region - even in the areas it holds most dear.
- Recent publications mark a shift in the thinking of U.S.-based China and Asia scholars: If China is hell-bent on changing the international order in Asia to accommodate its own wants and aspirations, why should America respects its core interests anymore?
- For example, if Taiwan wishes to enhance its own military with progress toward new conventional submarines, or by purchasing updated F-16 or even F-35 aircraft, Washington should help. America could even float the possibility of large arms sales agreements with Vietnam and the Philippines as a way to level the playing field.
- Washington could also speak out to a much greater extent on human rights abuses in China - specifically in Tibet and Xinjiang. Regular invitations to the White House for the Dali Lama and Chinese human rights activists would certainly get Beijing's attention.

Part 6: Question the U.S.-China Economic Relationship Openly

- China's growing power has always been rooted in its economic rise. Bearing in mind Beijing's actions over the last several years, it is long past time for Washington to consider whether its deep trade and economic relationship with China now runs counter to its own national interests.
- Just floating such an idea could raise eyebrows.

Act...Before It's Late...

- In just a few years time China will dominate the South China Sea.
- No nation should be allowed to effectively alter the status-quo so radically that it declares near-seas essentially part of its territory.
- Think of what other nations will do and how they are watching...