

The Rise of Blue Water Navy and its Implication for the Region

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Abstract : Alfred Thayer Mahan described the sea as a 'great common,' which would serve as a medium for communication, trade, and transport. The seas of Asia are witnessing an intriguing historical anomaly – rise of an indigenous maritime power against the backdrop of US domination over the region. As China transforms from an inward leaning economy to an outward-leaning economy, it has become increasingly dependent on the global sea; as a result, we witness an evolution in its maritime strategy from near seas defense to far seas deployment strategies. It is not only patrolling the international waters but has also built a network of civilian and military infrastructure across the disputed oceanic expanse. The paper analyses the reorientation of China from a naval power to a blue water navy in an era of extensive globalisation. The actions of the Chinese have created a zone of high alert amongst its neighbors such as Japan, Philippines, Vietnam and North Korea. These nations are trying to align themselves so as to counter China's growing brinkmanship, but China has been pursuing claims through a carefully calibrated strategy in the region shunning any coercive measures taken by other forces. If China continues to expand its maritime boundaries, its neighbors – all smaller and weaker Asian nations would be limited to a narrow band of the sea along its coastlines. Hence it is essential for the US to intervene and support its allies to offset Chinese supremacy. The paper intends to provide a profound analysis over the disputes in South China Sea and East China Sea focusing on Philippines and Japan respectively. Moreover, the paper attempts to give an account of US involvement in the region and its alignment with its South Asian allies. The geographic dynamics is said to breed a national coalition dominating the strategic ambitions of China as well as the weak littoral states. China has conducted behind the scenes diplomacy trying to persuade its neighbors to support its position on the territorial disputes. These efforts have been successful in creating fault lines in ASEAN thereby undermining regional integrity to reach a consensus on the issue. Chinese diplomatic efforts have also forced the US to revisit its foreign policy and engage with players like Cambodia and Laos. The current scenario in the SCS points to a strong Chinese hold trying to outpace all others with no regards to International law. Chinese activities are in contrast with US principles like Freedom of Navigation thereby signaling US to take bold actions to prevent Chinese hegemony in the region. The paper ultimately seeks to explore the changing power dynamics among various claimants where a rival superpower like US can pursue the traditional policy of alliance formation play a decisive role in changing the status quo in the arena, consequently determining the future trajectory.

Keywords : China, East China Sea, South China Sea, USA

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