

# **Indo- China Rivalry in the Vision of South China Sea**

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The discourse on world politics can never be a complete discussion without the discourse on Indo-China relation. The relation of commotion between these two countries is always considered as a hot instance in the world politics. The geographical conditions of both countries has influenced their foreign policies to a great extend, and it also provides some benefits for both countries to establish dominance in international sphere. It is clear as the daylight that the economic and technological power of these two countries is the main impetus of the 'international power'. For this reason the maritime region like South China Sea is being considered as a land territory to China. But why does China trying to establish his dominance on this region? Because the economic and technological development of China , and his increasing demand on natural resources, which is centred round the development. At the same time, China's attitude of establishing dominance on others lies in his past history of his freedom struggle. The social democratic revolution and his totalitarian genre have made China more conservative and unitarian. On the other hand in the history of India's freedom movement, the genre of liberal democracy was present. For this reason, the respect on pluralism and tolerance has influenced its foreign policy. As a result, under the circumstances of India's attainment of freedom in the fifties, the relationship between these two countries was built on the basis of 'Panchashila' principle. But it is not lasted for a long time. In the year of 1959 China captured Tibet and started genocide. Such instance and gross human right violation has exposed the orthodox and aggressive attitude of China before India. At that time, the aggressive attitude of China had brought the country under harsh criticism before the whole world (Mahaparta, 2015: 236-255).

Till the day India has faced the attacking spirit of China several times through the situations have not become as worse as that of 1962's Indo-China war. As a large emerging power in South Asia, has much India is developing its military strategy, China is trying so to hold back India. In 1958 China has published its map where he has claimed a large part of South China Sea as his own territory by the 'Nine -dash' line. Besides this, China has also been trying to keep its foot step up to the Gulf of Eden through the Indian Ocean. China's spirit of establishing its dominance over the countries of South Asia is clear through this effort. In this perspective, our main objectives are: firstly, to find out the main cause of contention between China and India, which centres round the South China Sea and its importance; secondly, to find out the maritime strategy taken by China to keep India pressure; and thirdly, to discuss the strategy this has taken by China to influence the countries around the South China Sea and China's relation with these countries.

We should discuss the geographical position or perimeters of the South China Sea before finding out its importance to these two countries and the reason of contention between them with the South China Sea. India is a country of South Asia. According to the geographical area, India is the largest country of South Asia and the seventh largest country of the world. On the western frontier of India, lies Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and China lie on the north and north eastern frontier, and Bangladesh and Myanmar lie on the east. Some countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia are the neighbouring

island countries of India in the Indian Ocean. India is surrounded by the Indian Ocean from the south, Arabian Sea from the west and the Bay of Bengal from the east. The total length of India's maritime boundary is 7517 k.m.

China lies in the eastern part of the continent of Asia and on the western peninsula of the Pacific Ocean. It is the largest neighbouring country of India lying on the north and north eastern frontier. The total land border of China is near about 22800 k.m. North Korea lies on the east to China; Mongolia on the north; Russia lies on the north east; Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Tajikistan on the North West; Afghanistan, Pakistan India Nepal and Bhutan lie on the west and south west. Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam are situated on the south to China. China has maritime border with South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. The South China Sea shares a large part of this maritime boundary of China. The South China Sea is a marginal portion of the west Pacific Ocean, which expands from the Malacca strait on the south west to the Taiwan Strait on the north east. The main land territory of China lies on the north of the South China Sea, and the Indo-Chinese peninsula which is the main continental land territory of the south East Asia, lies on the west. This area is situated on the east to the Indian sub-continent and on the south to China. And this region is bordered by the Indian Ocean from the west and the Pacific Ocean from the east. The island countries of Taiwan, Philippines and Indonesia are situated respectively on the East, North West and South to the South China Sea. Besides these countries, other bordering countries of the South China Sea are: Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The total area of this region is 3,500,000 square k.m. This large maritime region has enough geo-strategic importance. China has to use the territory of the South China Sea to maintain its dominating motion in the sphere of international politics. This region has enough geo-political importance to the whole world as well. Not only the countries adjacent to the South China Sea, all of the powerful countries across the world have also the spirit to establish dominance over this maritime region. But why is China's spirit of dominance over the South China Sea so intensive? And why have some other countries including India become rivals to China on vesting their own authority over this region? If we want to find out the answers to those questions, we have to understand the geo-strategic importance of the South China Sea at first.

The South China Sea is one of the most important and busiest international water routes of the world. One third of world's total maritime goods transportation is occurred through this sea route, whose economic value is near about \$5 trillion and this amount is increasing in every year. For this reason, this area is considered as the second largest used sea lane of the world. As strategic resources, there are huge deposits of hydrocarbons and other natural resources. Under this sea, the deposit of about 28 billion barrels of hydrocarbons are reported of which 7.7 billion barrels is mineral oil. The deposit of natural gas is estimated to be 266 trillion cubic feet. The country which can establish its control over this sea route will enjoy the military advantage to sway over this area as well as over the whole continent of Asia. The geo-political importance of this area is immense on controlling the politico-economic flow of the whole Asia. In analysing the geo-political importance, the island countries of this sea can be divided into two chains- one of them is Paracels island which comprise the north western corner position of the South China Sea. The another is Spartly island which comprise the south eastern corner of the South China Sea. The main cause of growing contention with this region centres round the fact political polarisation and territorial demand made by the countries like China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei and Singapore which are situated around the South China Sea. Where India maintains its position strategically against the most powerful country of South Asia and in favour of the other countries lying around the South China Sea.

In fact, the Indian Ocean is of great geopolitical importance in terms of India's security and overall interests. That is why India has been playing a leading role in the region all well as maintaining

friendly relations with other states. In the same way, India seeks to establish its leadership in the South China Sea region as well as maintain cooperative relations with ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) member states (Li Zhang,2010:28-29). This is evident from the remarks made by Indian Foreign Secretary Syed Akbaruddin on the 2013 dispute between China and Philippines. He said the dispute between China and Philippines over the South China Sea has not only jeopardized the peace and security of the South China Sea, but also the interests of the entire international community. India sincerely wants the two countries (China & Philippines) to hold talks at their diplomatic level in accordance with international law to resolve their dispute peacefully and maintain international stability. But in this case, China's aggressive attitude has made India an adversary of China. As a result, India today seeks to establish itself as a major power in the indo-Pacific region. That is why India today, by adopting the Look East Policy, is more interested in improving political, economic and diplomatic relations with the ASEAN countries in Southeast Asia. At the ASEAN summit on 21 December 2012, the then Prime Minister of India remark that India should strengthen its political and security understanding with the countries of East Asia and ASEAN, work together and be committed to an open and balanced regional cooperation (Kothari, 2015: 71-77). India has expanded its diplomacy to the South China Sea, known as 'extended neighbourhood'. Using this idea, India expanded its maritime exercise area beyond South Asia in 2000 to put pressure on neighbouring superpower China, which is important to achieving its diplomatic goal (Gady, 2016). Although there has been no frontal war between the two countries over the South China Sea, the two countries have been working hard to create tension aspiring to become the world's second largest naval power by 2020, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has undertaken a massive modernisation programme. The Indian Navy plans to add 160 naval ships to the 'Big Five's league by 2022. The fact that both countries are motivating their navies and continuing their efforts to increase their strength is proven from their budget allocations to the defence sector. Even the areas of traditional maritime influence of their growing aggression against each other confirm their desire to become strong navy in the 'blue waters'<sup>1</sup> and serve their national interest beyond their immediate borders (Mohan, 2013: 154-157). India has been maintaining the amicable relationship and partnership with all of the ASEAN countries as it wants to derogate the dominating spirit of China. The contention between these two countries begins in the later half of the twentieth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, the atmosphere of the South China Sea was peaceful. Even after the end of World War-II, there was none to claim for a single island in the South China Sea. China claims its right over the South China Sea in the year of 1947 and includes most of the South China Sea region into its political map by 'U' shaped line through '11-Dashes'. But at the beginning of the 1950, two dashes of the 11 dashes were removed in the Gulf of Tonkin for the frequentation of the communist comrades of North Vietnam. The rest, 9-Dashes line extended about 100 k.m. upto the south and east of the Hainan Island. It was extended on covering upto 90 percent of the South China Sea. Territorial claims over this region started increasing almost limitlessly after the sixties when huge deposits of oil and natural gas where discovered there. And because of it the imposition of international laws were felt necessary to protect the rights over this blue water. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was accepted and signed in 1982, and claims over maritime resources were extended and formalized by this international law. During this period the governments of more than six countries started claiming their rights over Paracels and Sparty Island in the South China Sea. And with this various countries started militarisation over this area to find out the sports rich with maritime resources. In the year of 2009, Vietnam raised its voice by claiming its rights over 48 small islands which were occupied since 1970. And as its reaction, China started claiming its rights over the bunk resources which were occupied since 1980 ( Austin G,2020). The dominating spirit of China over this region and his bargaining tendency is where then others as the country enjoys some more natural benefits than others. And for this natural benefits China has established its control over the dispute islands of the South China Sea.

And this control has provided Beijing the power to apply strategic dominance over benefits and rights of the neighbouring countries. Besides this, China has increased its power by making artificial island and naval patrolling in this region (Sen A, 2020). India was not engaged in this contention for a long period. Neither it was in favour of any other power. India was conscious enough about its stand. But because of increasing pacts with the East Asian countries, India has started thinking indirectly of illegitimate claims of China.

C.Rajamohan has shown, by finding out pre-historic civilisation of both India and China, that the development of naval power of the both countries has been influenced by the Mahanian thought<sup>2</sup>. Though the 1962 war was confined in land borders, yet it affected the thoughts of the defence planners of India. The border disputes have become a large problem for both countries- Tibet and Xinjiang from China and Jammu-Kashmir and North East from India's side ( Mohan, 2013:65-72). But now the maritime relations between these two countries have become an important factor for controlling the politico-economic conditions of both the countries in future. The importance of marine territories has increased for dependence on commercial activities for two great powers of South Asia. For this reason, for both the powers, the increasing dependence on maritime commerce which is about 90 percent has placed the ocean on top of the relationship (ibid. 136-143). Both China and India have held their position on the South China Sea as it is the most important factor in case of establishing dominance on international maritime activities. India has larger benefits over the South China Sea from geo-politic, geo-strategic and geo-economic sides. Though geographically India is not an integral part of the South China Sea, yet it is engaged with the peninsular countries of South China Sea through various activities like naval exercises, visits, strategic partnership, oil exploration and diplomatic issues.

India has firmly included the South China Sea in its interests since becoming a strategic partner with ASEAN. India adopted the Act East Policy in 2014, further expanding the Look East Policy to ensure its important position in East Asia. The 'Act East Policy' emphasizes economic cooperation as well as extensive infrastructure development and strategic and security agreement. India's main goal is to achieve its best position in the Indian Ocean. For this, India has entered their market through new members of ASEAN. One of India's goals is to thwart China's growing dominance in the South China Sea. India would never want China to use the South China Sea to increase its power as far as the Strait of Malacca, so that China would be able to increase surveillance over the Indian Ocean. The Malacca Strait is a strategic position for entry into India from the rear. India never wants China come to this place to control the 'blue water'. China's confrontation with the South China Sea littoral states have led to the emergence of a number of additional regional powers for security in the full environment. In 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) for strategic security in support of Australia, India and United States. The QUAD is an informal dialogue that combines security and military cooperation to prevent growing expansion of Chinese military intervention in South China Sea along with Indo-Pacific region (Bagchi, 2018:).

At present, China, the major power in South East Asia, is providing various financial and technical assistance to its neighbours and using them to make pressure on India. It is part of China's 'Go West' strategy as a counter to India's 'Act East Policy'. With this policy, China continues its efforts to encircle India, using the South China Sea as a 'link way'. That is why India is being forced to adopt a 'tactical defensive policy' rather than 'peaceful policy' to break its stalemate. Given the current situation, New Delhi will have to give up its hesitant attitude if necessary. India needs to take sides in the conflict and consider a strategic partnership with the United States. If India pursues a policy of peaceful pacification of China without taking sides, its long term defeat is inevitable. The United States is seen as the only force to resists China in the South China Sea (Jawli, 2016: 96-97). But ASEAN states do not want to include any other power in the region. They feared that if outsiders used the area as a legitimate partner, the stability of the sea could be undermined. At the ASEAN- India

summit in November 2011, it was stated that the occupancy of the region by China or any other major power (US) would not be supported (Singh, 2012). But different situation have arisen, recognizing the necessities India is engaging naval cooperation with the United States, Japan and others. India is also seeking to put China in the face of strong resistance by prolonging its engagements with the littoral states of the South China Sea. As a powerful state for economic prosperity, China has been providing military and economic assistance to SAARC countries and in return has been using its military bases to operate uninterrupted in the Indian Ocean for several years. China is becoming an influential factor in the Indian Ocean through diplomatic & military investment, even though it is not a power in this region. In fact, the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea are related to each other. China does not want India to dominate the South China Sea; similarly, India does not want China to dominate the Indian Ocean. The rivalry between these two Asian giants continues in the ocean water which is likely to establish a maritime balance of power between India and China (Jawli, 2016: 88-90). However, in this case, China's arbitrary and irrational actions centred on the South China Sea must be dealt with multilateral perspective and it will be difficult to undermine the dominance of a powerful state like China if it does not create a united front.

#### Notes:

1. According to international law, a state includes maritime territory within 10 to 12 miles of its coastline, but at present world powers want to keep their foothold on the deep sea in order to establish their dominance in the maritime region. This area can be considered as blue water.
2. The United States naval officer and most important strategist of the nineteenth century Alfred Thayer Mahan in his book 'The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783' argued that British control of the seas, combined with a corresponding decline in the naval strength of its major European rivals, paved the way for Great Britain's emergence as the world's dominant military, political and economic power.

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