

Behavior of small states from the perspective of International Relations theory: An analysis of South China Sea

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.01.2019.p85115

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.01.2019.p85115>

Abstract

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have long been one of the most critical and complex issues of security between south-east Asian states and China. The competition for maritime rights has emerged as the most important security issue in the east Asia.

The powerful states have a tendency for domination. The smaller states may not show their dominating behavior over other states, but they have tendency to maximize their relative power by making alliance with great power or by other means. Since the smaller states are not capable enough individually to ensure their own security or to use military force against threatening power, they have tendencies to join in alliances or in other words to create balance of power to ensure their own security. This study attempts to analyze the behavior of small states and to find out which theory matches with the behavior.

The behavior of small states like Vietnam and the Philippines cannot be well-explained by the realist approach. They behave to make their existent clear and safeguard themselves only. Making allies with great powers as well as economic ties simultaneously with other economic powers render their behavior of having peaceful coexistent with everyone.

Key Words: dispute, small states, maritime borders, security.

1. INTRODUCTION

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Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have long been one of the most critical and complex issues of security between southeast Asian states and China. The competition for maritime rights has emerged as the most important security issue in the East Asia. Even more broadly, the entire Asia-Pacific region is involved in the dispute.

The powerful states usually have a tendency for domination. The smaller states may not show their dominating behavior over other states, but they have tendency to maximize their relative power by making alliance with great power or by other means. Since the smaller states are not capable enough individually to ensure their own security or to use military force against threatening power, the smaller states have tendencies to join in alliances or in other words to create balance of power to ensure their own security. This study aims to explore the tendency or behavior with relations to the theory of International Relations.

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study is to analyze the behavior of small states and to find out whether the theory of realism matches with the behavior of small states.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realism is regarded as the most dominating theory in international relation. From realist point of view, states are motivated by the desire for military and economic power for security. Neo-realism describes anarchic structure of world politics rather than human nature. In anarchical structure

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states remain wary of each other and compete with each other. In this system cooperation among states always aim at maximizing their relative power.

Liberalists focused on economic interdependence and good relations among the states rather than confrontation, while in constructivist theory international institutions have impact on state's behavior. Interaction and socialization brings collective identity to a state.

These theories of International Relations make scope to study the behavior of small states in the activities of cooperation with each other especially with powerful states.

Medeiros (2005) has found that many scholars supported the realist tradition to describe security in Asia. Asian states hedging or balancing against rising China. The US is also continuing as a dominant power (Sutter, 2008). Mearsheimer (2001) has applied realism theory to explain Asia. He argued that China will seek hegemonic authority and asymmetry between rising power and existing leading power will characterize Asian order and cause great power.

This study has been done within this framework of realist theory of International Relations since the Asia is experiencing having China as a future great power along with some small states who are gaining economic strength.

IV. METHODS OF STUDY

This study approaches qualitative analysis. The secondary data such as journals, books, news, articles have been analyzed to find out the objective.

V. SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE AND STAKEHOLDERS

The South China Sea dispute is mainly the dispute in demarcation of maritime border. It is believed to be rich in natural gas, oil and fish. The number of claimants is at least six - China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei (Ruland, 2004). All have occupied atolls and islets in the Spratly Archipelago and erected military installations. China occupied Mischief Reef in 1995 which was claimed

by the Philippines as part of their Kalayan islands (Ruland, 2004).

Sharkov (2016) showed that the United States Energy Information Agency has estimated 11 billion barrels of oil and 5.38 trillion cubic meters of natural gas in deposits under the sea—more than what exists in the reserves of some of the world's biggest energy exporters.

The waters also contain lucrative fisheries that account for, according to some estimates, 10 percent of the global total. A lot of fishing boats are cruising around in waters contested by several different navies, increasing the risk of conflict.

The area's greatest value is as a trade route. According to a 2015 US Department of Defense report, \$5.3 trillion worth of goods moves through this sea every year, which is about 30 percent of global maritime trade. That includes huge amounts of oil and \$1.2 trillion worth of annual trade with the United States.

This gets to a core contradiction in the South China Sea dispute: It is driven by territorial competition, yet all countries involved want open sea routes. Everyone benefits from the free flow of goods between Asia and the rest of the world, and everyone suffers if that is disrupted.

This is part of why the United States stresses freedom of movement in international waters. While it is very unlikely that China would ever want to close off trade, the United States would still rather not allow Beijing even the ability to hold the global economy hostage.

From China's perspective, the United States itself has that ability, because of American naval dominance; the Chinese also suspect that the global status quo is engineered to serve Western interests first. So it is hardly surprising that China is seeking greater control over waterways it relies on for economic survival.

This is a dynamic that has permeated Sino-American relations throughout China's rise over the past two decades. In theory, both nations understand they are better off cooperating. But in practice, they often treat each other as

competitors or potential threats—a cycle that is difficult to break.

China, for the past few years, has been asserting ever greater control over faraway water that was previously considered international or was claimed by other countries. Chinese state media outlets responded recently by publishing a map. It showed the South China Sea with most of the waters encircled with the "nine-dash line" that has long represented China's claims in the strategic waterway (Sharkov, 2016).

This little line has shown up on official Chinese maps since the 1940s (it began with 11 dashes). It demarcates a vast but vague stretch of ocean from China's southern coast most of the South China Sea.

China has never clarified the line's exact coordinates. But it sweeps across waters — and some small islands — that are claimed by five other nations. It seems to go many beyond what is allowed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), which China signed.

For China, the line represents long-lost historical claims that the country, after two centuries of weakness, is finally strong enough to recover. For the other nations, the line is a symbol of what they characterize as a naked power grab by China. China claiming this has seized small land formations or reefs, sometimes dredging up underwater to make the islands large enough to the stakeholders of the South China support small military installations.

China's naval forces have also grown more aggressive in patrolling these claims and chasing off non-Chinese ships. That is part of why its neighbors see this as an effort by China to dominate the region. This is also about whether China will comply with international laws and norms, while Beijing sometimes views as a plot to constrain the country's rise.

The United States has gotten involved, sending the Navy to patrol waters it insists are Emotional and backing international mediation efforts. Washington says it wants to free movement and rule by international law. The risk of outright conflict is extremely low, but the militarization of

these heavily trafficked and heavily fished waters is still dangerous.

The international tribunal in July this year ruled that Philippines fishermen should be given access alongside Chinese fishermen in the contested waters dismissed China's that land elevations in the regions can be considered islands (Sharkov, 2016). The tribunal rejected the nine-dash line that China has used to indicate its South China Sea claims. This could open the way for other Asian states to challenge China's claims. So the letter of international law seems to say that China could be compelled to abandon many of its South China Sea claims.

But while the ruling is considered binding, there is no enforcement mechanism. China the proceedings, saying that the tribunal had no jurisdiction and that it would ignore decision—a position it reiterated after the ruling came out (Sharkov, 2016).

VI. BEHAVIOUR OF SMALL STATES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

Being the stakeholders of the South China Sea the countries except US and China are among the small states. In this study cases of Vietnam and the Philippines have been studied these two countries are the most prominent claimants of the parts of the sea. The behaviors have been analyzed in terms of their relations with US and China.

A. Relation of Philippines with US and China

Both the security and economic relations have been studied to understand the actual dimension of growing relations between countries.

i) Security Cooperation

The United States has begun to provide \$40 million in technical expertise, training and equipment through the Global Security Contingency Fund to strengthen the Philippines security operations and maritime domain awareness capabilities, the United States is supporting the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as it transits from internal security to external defense (as outlined in the

Philippines government's 2011 "Internal Peace and Security Plan"). This funding also assists the Philippines National Police as they assume a leading role in providing internal security and combating terrorism (white house website, 2016).

The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between US and Philippines will help US-Philippines alliance continue to promote the peace and stability. The agreement will facilitate the enhanced rotational presence of U.S. forces; facilitate humanitarian and disaster relief in the Philippines and the region; improve opportunities for training and support the long-term modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as it works to establish a minimum credible defense (white house website, 2016).

The United States, through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, is also helping to construct a Philippines National Coast Watch Center in Manila that will assist the Philippines Coast Guard in assuming increased responsibility for enhancing information sharing and interagency coordination in maritime security operations.

ii) Economic Cooperation

Philippines's main import partners are: China (25 percent), the United States (9 Percent), Japan (10 percent) and South Korea (8 percent) (tradingeconomics.com, 2016), while Philippines's main export partners are: China (21 percent), the United States (14 Percent), Japan (15 percent) and South Korea (4 percent) (tradingeconomics.com, 2016). This study reveals that China is the most prominent partner in both import and export context.

iii) Recent development in ties with China

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte recently has announced his "separation" from the United States, declaring he had realigned with China as the two agreed to resolve their South China Sea dispute through talks. Duterte made his comments in Beijing, where he was visiting with at least 200 business people to pave the way for what he has called a new commercial alliance as relations with longtime

ally Washington deteriorate (Reuters, 2016). He rendered that there will be no relation with America except social relation.

Duterte's efforts to engage China, months after a tribunal in the Hague ruled that Beijing did not have historic rights to the South China Sea in a case brought by the previous administration in Manila, marks a reversal in foreign policy of the Philippines. According to the trade secretary, Ramon Lopez, a total of \$13.5 billion in deals has been signed during a recent China trip (Reuters, 2016). China has welcomed the Philippines approaches, even as Duterte has vowed not to surrender any sovereignty to Beijing, which views the South China Sea Hague ruling as null and void. China has also expressed support for his drug war, which has raised concern in Western capitals about extrajudicial killing.

B. Relation of Viet Nam with US and China

Similarly with Philippines, both the security and economic relations have been studied to understand the dimension of growing relations between countries.

i) Security Cooperation

Restrictions on the sales of military equipment and arms were one of the few US trade restrictions with Vietnam that remains in place since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 (Martin, 2016). In 2010, then U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Michalak informed about likeliness to expand military to military relationship to include the sale of arms. Rising U.S. concerned about China's increased assertiveness over disputed islands and waters in the South Sea have led the Obama Administration to see Vietnam as a partner on maritime security issues (Martin, 2016). As a result, on October 2, 2014, announcement comes about the United States allowing the future transfer of maritime security-related defense article to Vietnam. In November 2015, another announcement comes from White House about providing \$19.6 million in maritime assistance to Vietnam in FY2015 and \$20.5 million in FY2016 (Martin, 2016).

USA has also elevated its security priority which is visible through talks with Vietnam about the use of former Soviet base Cam Ranh Bay (Manicom, 2013).

ii) Economic Cooperation

Main import partners of Vietnam are China (98 percent of the total imports), Korea (14 percent), Japan (9 percent) and US (4 percent) while main export partners are: the United States (20 percent of the total exports), China (13 percent), Japan (10 percent), South Korea (5 percent), Hong Kong (4 percent) and Germany (4 percent) (white house website, 2016). This study reveals that China is the most prominent partner in the context of import. In case of export, United States shares the major part, But the shares of China is increasing gradually (tradingeconomics.com).

VII. ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIOR OF VIETNAM AND PHILIPPINES IN TERMS OF IR THEORIES

The continued rise of China's economic and maritime power is the leading influence on the future maritime security environment of Asia. The United States is declining in strategic and political influence, while China looms as a major power with global interests.

After the cold war US became the only super power. But currently US unipolar domination in Asia is seen to be loosened. The decline of US and the rise of Asian countries seem to be the main causes behind this. The present role of USA in Asia has therefore begun to transform into a balancer from a leader (Honggang, 2014). Despite uncertainty about US capacity to maintain regional presence in light of economic cooperation, the cuts to defense spending will not come at the expense of forces deployed in the Asia-Pacific. It has come out from the number of US officials speeches. The then US Secretary of Defense Mr. Panetta mentioned in the Shangri La Dialogue in 2012 that 60% of US navy will be deployed in the Pacific by 2020 (Manicom, 2013).

The Philippines and Vietnam increasingly worry that they are at a disadvantage in the competition with an increasingly powerful China. This feelings has made them act and

preemptively continuously strengthen the control over islands already they have occupied. They move closer to the United States to gain more support (Honggang, 2014). In line with it Vietnam has increased its number of submarines in the South China Sea along with other claimant countries (Manicom, 2013).

From this point of view it seems that both the countries are eager to make allies with US to get stronger against their rival China. But the economic cooperation with China largely reveals that they want economic cooperation rather than power politics. Recent remarks of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte regarding economic tie with China, that has already mentioned earlier, make this view stronger.

The behavior of small states like Vietnam and the Philippines cannot be well-explained by the realist approach. In the case of China, the hegemonic nature can be found since it is aggrieved to conquer the most of the South China Sea and opted to tackle USA egoistically. But the small states like Vietnam and the Philippines behave to make their existent clear and safeguard themselves only. Due to this reason, they make allies with great powers. But economic ties with China render their behavior of having peaceful co-existence with everyone.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

To establish a secured order in Asia for further economic development, United States should rebalance its presence in Asia to adjust with China and other growing economy. China as a rising economy should play positive role to accommodate other smaller economies and keep good balance with United States. The other small states should keep balanced relation with China and United States.

In the International system, there is an unequal distribution of power among states. The capacity to pursue and achieve objectives varies according to the relative power of states. There are many studies which focus the issues from great power's perspectives. But the number of studies focusing small weaker states is very little. This study shows their dominating behavior over other states. To keep the peaceful

existence in the region, China as a super economy of Asia should play the positive role that will be helpful for greater cooperation in the region.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am indebted to Professor Amena Mohsin of the University of Dhaka who has helped me a lot in preparing this paper.

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