

India's Stakes in South China Sea

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It is true that the current regional power balance is greatly in favour of China and its economic power swamps many Asia Pacific countries including Japan, India and South Korea. China is capitalizing on its power potential and the grammar and language of recent Chinese announcements, articulations and actions relating to sovereignty contestations and territorial disputes and its penchant for intimidating its neighbours has sent discomfoting signals among the Asia Pacific region. Ironically, China's advocacy to generate peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region has touched a nadir; instead it has added to uncertainties that can potentially undermine regional stability.

In recent times, South China Sea has been at the centre stage of Asia Pacific regional security debate and discourse. China has claimed sovereignty over the entire South China Sea. It has exhibited assertiveness at sea, objected to offshore exploration activities in the EEZ of claimant states, has challenged the internationally accepted freedom of navigation in international waters, and on occasions shown proclivity for saber rattling. Significantly, China has rejected and warned external powers such as the US, Japan, South Korea and India to stay away from the South China Sea disputes. The prevalent view among Asia Pacific countries about China is of suspicion, distrust and anxiety due to Chinese behaviour and intentions in conduct of its international relations clearly raising the 'China threat' to new levels.

The reverberations of developments in South China Sea have been felt in India too. Although not a claimants to any territory in South China Sea, the region gains salience for India on account of its maritime trade which transits through the region. These sea-lanes are critical for India's economic vitality. India also has stakes in the oil and gas exploration in the region and has been engaged in commercial energy transactions with Vietnam since the late 1980s. New Delhi's concerns also arise from the Chinese articulation of its 'core interests' which Beijing may expand to include the disputed areas in India's northern borders.

This paper attempts to highlight the significance of South China Sea in India's political, economic and strategic calculus. It begins by showcasing that South China Sea

had been an integral part of India's socio-cultural, economic and politico interactions with the ancient kingdoms adjoining South China Sea. The paper then examines India's operational and commercial interests in South China Sea and argues that India is an important stakeholder in then evolving economic and politico-security dynamics in South China Sea. The paper also presents India's transactions with China with regard to its boundary disputes in the Himalayas particularly in the context of the ongoing military infrastructure build up which impacts on Indian security and adds to its uneasiness.

Politico-strategic Developments in South China Sea

The tone and tenor of the statements and actions by the South China Sea claimants with regard to their assertion over the sovereignty over the South China Sea has brought the issue to the forefront in the Asia Pacific security discourse. The harsh reality is that the tranquil waters of South China Sea appear to churn with insecurity. A non-binding multilateral agreement '2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea' (DoC) with focus on the Spratly Islands has been in place since 2002 wherein China and ASEAN countries agreed to work together to build trust and confidence, exercise restraint for creating a positive atmosphere for the eventual resolution of disputes, and to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Although the DoC was a concrete step to institutionalize regional dialogue among the claimants and served for the de-escalation of military tensions in South China Sea, it appears that it was unable to dispel 'China Threat' among the claimant states. China has always been keen to deal with the claimants on a one-to-one basis unlike the ASEAN countries who seek 'a more formal and legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea' to bring about stability in the region. The region, therefore, remains a fertile ground for conflict in the light of territorial claims, ambitions and flashpoints.

The claimants have been engaged in building infrastructure on several islands in South China Sea to support military operations. What is noteworthy is that the buildup resulted in a number of airstrips turning these islands into unsinkable aircraft carriers. It is possible to stage smaller military aircraft of the VSTOL (vertical short takeoff and landing) variety. According to the Taiwanese Air Force Chief, Liu Kui-li 'Because of the strong likelihood that landing strips at air bases will come under intensive missile attack

and be destroyed during a war with China, the air force considers fighters with VSTOL capabilities to be most suitable for Taiwan's defense.¹

Currently, there are four known airstrips of various sizes on the Spratly Islands. Rancudo Airfield (1300 meters) on the Pagasa, occupied by the Philippines, is the longest and C130 transport aircraft land on a regular basis. Islets occupied by Malaysia (Swallow Reef or Layang Layang), Vietnam (Truong Sa Lon) and Taiwan (Taipingdao) are home to 600 meter air strips while Brunei has not invested in any such facility. The forward deployed aircraft on these islands can serve as deterrent and also be put into combat at short notice till reinforcements come from mainland. As far as China is concerned, the Woody Island is bristling with a range of military related infrastructure including a well developed runway for military use, a mobile missile battery, naval facilities for ships and a network of intelligence and communication infrastructure. The Sanya Naval base has sophisticated infrastructure to host both nuclear and conventional submarine and is a perfect launching point for nuclear submarines into the South China Sea.

The claimants have so far attempted to keep military activity in the defensive mode; however, as sovereignty issues gain primacy, energy exploration activity intensifies in disputed areas, there will be tensions in the region.

The current naval inventory and the ongoing acquisition plans among the South China Sea claimants is worrisome. They continue to build their military / naval capability to deter and in some cases consolidate through bilateral military engagements with extra regional powers. The thrust of naval acquisitions is on submarines equipped with anti-ship and land-attack missiles, modern torpedoes, electronic support measures and above all the AIP that makes these vessels a formidable platform. The regional navies see several benefits in acquiring these platforms that could serve as force multipliers and also as anti-access platforms centred on credible conventional deterrence. Likewise, shore based fighter jets to attack targets at sea are fast gaining primacy. These could be deployed, in the future, through extended runways on the unsinkable aircraft carriers.

¹ Rich Chang, "Air Force Plans to Buy Jets That Need Shorter Runway", *Taipei Times*, January 23, 2006.

India and South China Sea: The Historical Context

India's socio-cultural engagements and commercial interests with the countries surrounding the South China Sea can be traced back to ancient times. It had extensive trading linkages with the kingdoms of Funan, the ancient state in Cambodia, Srivijaya in Sumatra and several kingdoms of South and East China. South China Sea facilitated connectivity for trade that had generated a complex and a burgeoning trading system among China, Southeast Asia and India. Besides, a Hindu kingdom called Champa (southern Vietnam and Cambodia) existed in Indo-China.

South China Sea also facilitated cross-cultural linkages wherein Buddhist monks travelled from China through Palembang in Sumatra to Tamralipti in India. Fa Hsien, a Buddhist monk on his return journey to China from India travelled in A.D. 413-14 and transited through the South China Sea.² This voyage encouraged other Chinese pilgrim to undertake similar voyages to India by the sea route through the South China Sea. I'sing, another Chinese monk visited Palembang enroute to India in A.D. 671 and 695 and traveled by the sea route through South China Sea.³

Chola kings in India had developed political and trading links in China and had dispatched Embassies to southern China. We learn that an embassy representing the Chola kingdom had arrived at the Song court in 1077. Also, Chinese ceramics and coins found along Tamil Nadu coast serve as evidence of the lively trade between southern India and China. Further, an inscription found in Guangzhou notes of the contributions made to a Taoist monastery on behalf of the Chola monarch Kulottunga I.

Interestingly, during that period, 'building temples' emerged as an important part of diplomacy among states. For instance, a Chinese source states that in 720 the Pallava king Narasimhavarman II "constructed a temple [in Tamil Nadu] on account of the empire [i.e. China]," The Kaiyuan Temple, a Buddhist temple built in the Tang period in 686 CE has a bas relief of Hanuman, an Indian God, on one of the Temple's pagodas, and also has a large number of Indic carvings. Further, three Hindu temples were built in southern China where "Brahmans" resided during the eighth century. A Hindu temple has been discovered at Quanzhou in China.

² Thomas Suarez, *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia*, (Singapore : Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd.,1999),p.48.

³ K. Nilakanta Sastri, *Cola* (Madras: University of Madras, 2000), p.604; George Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, (Hawaii: East West Centre Press, 1968),p.81.

Contemporary Developments: Resource Exploitation

India has been engaged in joint offshore energy development projects with Vietnam in the South China Sea since late 1980s. The state owned ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) in partnership with PetroVietnam and British Petroleum began exploration in South China Sea in 1992 and 1993 which resulted in the discovery of the Lan Do and Lan Tay gas fields that were estimated to contain reserves of around 58 billion cubic metres that would result in three billion cubic metres of gas a year.⁴ However, in the 1990s, due to financial crisis, OVL had to sell its stake to BP. In 2010, due to Gulf of Mexico oil spill liability, BP announced plans to sell its energy assets in Vietnam and this prompted OVL along with Vietnam's PetroVietnam joined hands to bid for the BP's stake in Nam Con Son gas fields spread over 955-square kilometre include two offshore gas fields, a pipeline and power project.⁵ The upstream part of the Nam Con Son project also referred to as Block 06.1 is about 370 km Southeast of Vung Tau on the southern Vietnamese coast. The Block 06.1 comprises of the Lan Tay (currently produces around 14 million standard cubic metres per day of gas) and Lan To gas fields which are currently under development. Reports indicate that the OVL has invested \$217 million on the gas fields and could invest up to \$377.46 million. OVL also has stakes in two other exploration blocks 127 and 128 in Vietnam.

Maritime Trade

There are several geo-economic and geo-strategic causal factors that shape India's interest in South China Sea. In spatial terms, South China Sea is a seamless sea space and provides connectivity to the broader Asia Pacific region. Nearly 50 percent of Indian trade transits through the South China Sea bound for destinations in the Asia Pacific region and through the Pacific Ocean towards North and South Americas.

As far as India's Look East Policy is concerned, India's relations with the ASEAN countries have acted as catalyst and served as an important driver of economic growth. The bilateral trade has grown from US\$ 2.4 billion in 1990 to US\$ 44.66 billion

⁴ T.S. Subramanian, "The Vietnam connection", *Frontline*, Volume 20 - Issue 01, January 18 - 31, 2003.

⁵ "BP's Vietnam project: Deora to support ONGC bid", available at <http://business.rediff.com/report/2010/oct/01/bps-vietnam-project-deora-to-support-ongc-bid.htm> accessed on October 2, 2010.

in 2008-09.⁶ Both partners have expressed their commitment to strengthen economic cooperation to enhance bilateral trade to US\$ 70 billion by 2012.⁷ In 2009, India and ASEAN signed the FTA that came into force in July 2010.⁸ This FTA is believed to be quite extensive covering a market of approximately 1.8 billion people and the plans envisage gradually cutting down tariffs over 4,000 product lines by 2016.⁹

Given the above economic realities, India is an important stakeholder in the evolving security dynamics in South China Sea and any insecurity in the region could adversely impact on India's trade and the economy. New Delhi's economic vitality pivots on assured supply of energy and safe and secure trading routes in the region including the Straits of Malacca. It has high stakes in keeping the sea-lanes open in the region.

Indian Naval Transits through South China Sea and Chinese Reaction

There have been several naval incidents between India and China in South China Sea. A recent incident involved the Indian amphibious assault vessel INS Airavat that had just finished a port call at Nha Trang and was on passage to Hai Phong in Vietnam. Apparently, a Chinese warship had attempted to interrogate the Indian warship to 'identify itself and explain its presence'. Since, the Indian warship did not see any Chinese naval ship or aircraft it continued its voyage towards its next port of call. Interestingly, at the time of the incident, the Indian warship was about 45 nautical miles from the Vietnamese coast in international waters. There is also a view that the interrogation by the Chinese warship could be due to anomalous propagation conditions and the Chinese warship may have been interrogating some other vessel and this transmission was picked up by the Indian warship. Apparently, both sides have attempted to play down the incident.

In the past too China has exhibited assertiveness in the South China Sea and opposed the "right of innocent passage" available to the international shipping in international waters under the Law of the Sea 1958 and the 1982 UNCLOS. For instance, in 1958, the Chinese authorities had objected to an Indian Navy vessel when it transited

⁶ "Look East Policy", *Press Bureau of India*, April 20, 2010 available at <http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=60558> accessed on August 30, 2010.

⁷ "India-ASEAN Summit Commits to Fight Terrorism, Other Crimes", *Net Indian News Network*, New Delhi, October 25, 2009.

⁸ "FTA with ASEAN to Eliminate Duties on 80% of Traded Goods", *Times of India*, August 14, 2009.

⁹ "ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations", available at <http://www.aseansec.org/5738.htm> accessed on May 12, 2010.

about 12 miles from the Chinese coastline but well outside the then internationally accepted three-mile territorial water limit. After restoration of diplomatic relations, naval contacts were established in 1994 marked by the visit of PLA Navy training ship Zhang He to Mumbai. This was followed by a successful reciprocal goodwill visit in 1995 by a flotilla of two Indian naval vessels to Shanghai.

In 2000, Indian Navy transited through South China Sea and announced exercises in the area. This Indian plan was perceived by China as a direct challenge since it considers the entire South China Sea as its waters. According to Indian Navy sources, “The Chinese have protested any navy carrying out exercises in the South China Sea, whether it is the US Navy, Japan or Singapore. We told them that we are passing through and would even visit them and carry out Passex (exercise) and they received us warmly,”¹⁰ The incident prompted a retired Indian official to observe that “Goodwill visits like these to China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia are to strengthen ties. India's moves are not aggressive or motivated with territorial designs” and a former Indian navy Chief remarked ‘that the Chinese protests only amounted to “pressure tactics”. Observers point that the Chinese are in habit of “making noise over an issue because they don't want their basic views to be ignored by the international community’.

China’s Reaction to Indian Offshore Exploration Activity in South China Sea

There have been politico-diplomatic exchanges between India and China in the past few weeks. Beijing issued a demarche to New Delhi stating that the activities of the Indian state owned oil company OVL in South China Sea were illegal ‘unless [China’s] permission is taken for exploration in Blocks 127 and 128’.¹¹ The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson noted that “Our consistent position is that we are opposed to any country engaging in oil and gas exploration and development activities in waters under China’s jurisdiction. We hope foreign countries will not get involved in the dispute...For countries outside the region, we hope they will respect and support countries in the region to solve this dispute through bilateral channels,”¹²

¹⁰ Gaurav C Sawant, “China Objects to Indian Presence in South China Sea”, *Indian Express*, October 14, 2000.

¹¹ Anupama Airy and Jayanth Jacob, “China objects to oil hunt, India says back off”, *The Hindustan Times*, September 15, 2011.

¹² Jaynth Jacob and Reshma Patil, “Beijing says keep off South China Sea, Delhi unmoved” *The Hindustan Times*, September 16, 2011.

The Indian government responded by stating that “ONGC Videsh Ltd has been in Vietnam for quite some time in offshore oil and natural gas exploration and they (Vietnam) are in the process of further expanding cooperation, with Essar Oil Ltd also being awarded a gas block in Vietnam...This (energy) is one important area of cooperation and we would like this to grow. Our cooperation with Vietnam or with any other country in the world is always as per international laws, norms and conventions,” Further the Indian spokesperson stated that India “supports freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and hopes that all parties to the dispute would abide by the 2002 declaration of conduct in the South China Sea”.¹³ Apparently China has announced that “There is no question about the freedom and safety of navigation in the South China Sea. Countries in and out of the region are beneficiaries,”¹⁴

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman dismissed Chinese sovereignty over the Blocks 127 and 128 and observed that there is “no legal basis and is thus invalid.” ; further, “Vietnam reiterates that cooperation projects in oil and gas between Vietnam and its foreign partners, including those in Lots 127 and 128, lie within its exclusive economic zones [EEZs] and continental shelf and are completely under Vietnamese sovereignty... in line with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and with international practices, as well as with multilateral and bilateral agreements to which Vietnam is party,”¹⁵ However, it will be useful to point out that Lots 127 and 128 are located in the Vietnam's exclusive economic zone but also spill into the sea space marked by the ‘nine-dotted line’ or ‘U-shape line’ or nine-dash map which is claimed by China.

Significantly, Truong Tan Sang, Vietnam’s President has observed that “Our [Vietnam] stand is that this is a purely commercial activity undertaken by a company. The dispute is for the two countries to sort out and India's participation in oil exploration

¹³ Liu Sheng, “India makes waves with South China Sea oil and gas exploration”, *Global Times* ,September 17, 2011.

¹⁴ “Japan muddies water in South China Sea”, *Xinhua*, October 10,2011.

¹⁵ “China pushes India east... toward Vietnam”, *Thanhnein News*, September 23, 2011.

does not amount to a political stand in favour of either country. Once the two countries sort out the issue India will talk to the country concerned,"¹⁶

There have been sharp reactions from the Chinese strategic community too. Wu Xinbo, professor at the Centre for American Studies, Fudan University remarked that "As a South Asian country, India actively takes part in East Asian issues through the support of the US, which has been advocating for Asian countries to counter China. The US takes every opportunity to counter China, and its joint military manoeuvres with Japan and other regional countries have been more frequent in recent years,"¹⁷

China's policy towards India has been one of eroding any possible India-U.S naval cooperation as it perceives such cooperation would be inimical to its interests. In that context, China also reacted to the 2007 quadrilateral naval exercises in the Bay of and issued a demarche' seeking an explanation from New Delhi, Washington, Tokyo and Canberra on the purpose of holding a meeting on May 24-25,2007 in Manila, Philippines. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang noted "China believes that to enhance mutual trust, expand cooperation for mutual benefit and remain win-win, being open and inclusive is the global trend,"¹⁸ referring to the evolving alliance among the democratic partners. In that context, Sun Shihai, Deputy Director of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASs) has noted, "The so-called democratic alliance is not good for Asia... Any attempts to take China as a rival or contain China will not work".

In an editorial in Global times, a Chinese commentator has noted that 'Chinese society has already been indignant about India's intervention in the Dalai (Lama) problem... India should bear in mind that its actions in the South China Sea will push China to the limit,'¹⁹

¹⁶ Sandeep Dikshit, "India, China to resume defence dialogue early next year", *The Hindu*, October 10, 2011.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Sidharth Srivastava, "India Expands her 'hard power' Capabilities as Emerging World Power: U.S. Remains a Key Strategic Partner", available at http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=14599 accessed on May 12, 2010.

¹⁹ Jason Miks, "India's South China Sea Warning", *The Diplomatist*, September 18, 2011.

India China Boundary Disputes: Lessons for South China Sea

Barring the initial years of their independence from the western colonial powers (India in 1947 and China in 1949) the two Asian countries have had a tumultuous relationship. In 1951, China annexed Tibet leading to mounting nervousness in New Delhi about the permanent stationing of the Chinese military on its northern borders. The 1962 India China war in the Himalayas and the capture of Aksai Chin further added to the chill in their relationship. China claims nearly 90,000 square kilometer in Arunachal Pradesh and is in occupation of nearly 43,000 sq km of territory in Jammu and Kashmir.²⁰ In 1963 Pakistan ceded more than five thousand square kilometers of territory in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) to China that culminated in the construction of the Karakoram Friendship Highway.

Both sides have attempted to lower the tensions and signed the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA) and the 1996 Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field. Although both the militaries have pulled back to rear positions, there is a near persistent border intrusion by the PLA as also build up of military infrastructure, including strategic missile deployments to support operations, when needed. There is significant trust deficit and China and India are increasingly concerned about each other's strategic intent, particularly over their respective military developments across the Himalayas.

There are numerous instances of blatant Chinese intrusions into the Indian territory. According to the Member of Parliament representing Arunachal Pradesh (West), "The Chinese (intrusions) are happening in a slow, creeping manner. Inch by inch, the Chinese station their army personnel and bring equipment." Besides border intrusion, air space violation and on one occasion an ambush by PLA soldiers is of concern to the Indian army. In 2008, there were reportedly "270 border violations and nearly 2,300 instances of 'aggressive border patrolling' by Chinese soldiers". Besides, nearly 4,000 Chinese construction personnel, including combat engineers from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been deployed in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).²¹ India's concerns also arise from the "The Chinese presence in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Northern

²⁰ R.D. Pradhan, *Dragon's Shadow Over Aunachal: A Challenge to India's Polity* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2008),pp.160-161.

²¹ "4000 Chinese, including PLA men, in PoK: Army chief", *The Times of India*, October 6, 2011.

Areas is increasing steadily. China is involved in construction and upgradation of numerous roads, bridges and hydropower projects. Chinese links with Pakistan, through PoK, lend strength to the China-Pakistan nexus, which has been of great security concern for us,"²²

China has very adeptly pushed the boundary disputes with India to the backburner and has very ably started a series of boundary talks so that the disputes can be settled on China's terms at a later date after it has built up requisite political, economic and military muscle. Its current approach towards India pivots on cordial relations. The political relations have witnessed an upswing with regular state level visits and their "Shared Visions on the 21st Century," hopes to push forward the Strategic Cooperative Partnership.²³ The economic and trade relations have improved significantly and the bilateral trade in 2008 was pegged at over U.S. \$ 51 billion, an increase of 34 percent over 2007. There have been some positive developments on the military front including joint exercises and India's participation in the International Fleet Review in China in April 2009. The trends are likely to continue in the near future.

At another level, New Delhi's concerns also arise from the Chinese articulation of their 'core interest' to include Tibet and Taiwan. It is feared that China may continue to announce new 'core interests' that may involve territories in India that China lays claims. It has been observed that "By declaring the South China Sea a 'core national interest' and elevating it to the same status as Tibet and Taiwan, Beijing has marked another territorial claim. If this is not challenged, it will gradually gain *de facto* international acceptance, as its claims over Tibet and Taiwan have in the last six decades."²⁴ In fact there have been periodic articulations in the Chinese media about Tawang. For instance, in 2009, during Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, *The Global Times* noted "Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made another provocative and dangerous move. India will make a fatal error if it mistakes China's approach for weakness. The Chinese government and public regard territorial integrity as a core

²² Ibid.

²³ Zhang Yan, "India-China Relations in One of the Best Periods in History", *The Hindu*, April 09, 2009.

²⁴ Claude Arpi, "China's Core Interests", *The New Indian Express*, August 28, 2010.

national interest, one that must be defended with every means,”²⁵ Further, a Chinese academic even suggested that ‘India would ‘just’ have to surrender the Aksai Chin plateau in Ladakh and Tawang and the border issue could be solved.’²⁶ These views must be tampered with another Chinese academic arguing that China should release list of its ‘core interests’ in a calibrated way “As China becomes stronger, we can publicize by instalments those core interests that our country can effectively safeguard,”²⁷

The Indian Ministry of Defence Report 2008-2009 has expressed concerns over Chinese military capabilities and observed that ‘greater transparency and openness’ is critical but on a conciliatory note also stated that India will ‘engage China, while taking all necessary measures to protect its national security, territorial integrity and sovereignty.’²⁸ There are fears in India about China’s military modernisation and augmentation of military infrastructure along the borders and should China include the disputed territory, like the South China Sea, could be worrisome for India. China sees India as a potential competitor and has identified several pressure points to contain India.

The big question therefore is ‘Does Chinese assertiveness at sea against India pose a threat?’ The dominant view is that China is a competitor and would evolve to be a threat for India in the future as it consolidates its power potential. In essence, security risks appear to regulate bilateral relations and could potentially undermine economic interdependence. This is notwithstanding the fact that the two sides have established a bilateral ‘Strategic Economic Dialogue’ and India-China economic relations are poised to witness a significant change with bilateral trade expected to double to US \$100 billion by 2015.

Concluding Remarks

India favours an amicable balance of power in Asia for peace and stability as also for economic development. It would like to work with regional countries to reduce tensions and contribute to regional stability which is critical for Asia’s growth. However, there are fears that South China Sea may become, in the future, an arena for contention

²⁵ Claude Apri, “Why the Chinese are so Upset about Tawang”, available at <http://news.rediff.com/slide-show/2009/oct/20/slide-show-1-why-chinese-are-so-upset-about-tawang.htm> accessed on September 10, 2010.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Willy Lam, “Hawks vs. Doves: Beijing Debates “Core Interests” and Sino-U.S. Relations”, *China Brief*, Volume: 10 Issue: 17, August 19,2010.

²⁸ “India Wary of Sino-Pak Strategic Link-up in Occupied Kashmir”, *Indian Express*, July 12, 2009.

and this could impact adversely impact on India's economic growth which is inextricably linked to maritime security.

India's democratic credentials, its benign strategic intent and its current focus on economic development gives New Delhi a crucial role commensurate with its national power, economic strength and strategic capacity. It is in this context, it can play a constructive role in the South China Sea.

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