China’s maritime policies and the South China Sea

Quotes & statements to grasp China’s perspective

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Why the South China Sea is so important to China?
Why historical rights are so important?

• The Chinese claim to the islands of the South China Sea was reaffirmed in the last Qing dynasty against France, which occupied Cochinchine, Annam and Tonkin. France first seemed to recognize Chinese sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratly reiterated by the new Republic of China in 1911 and 1921 before annexing the islands in 1932 to prevent a Japanese take over, citing Vietnamese Emperor Gia Long’s administration of the islands.

• in 1946 the Guomindang reestablished Chinese sovereignty with Engineers Zhuo Zhenxiong (1892-1963) and Mai Lunzhuji (1896-1995) documenting Chinese claims and embarking on the Taiping frigate one year before the publication of the eleven dash lines.

“the PRC cannot do less than the Kuomintang, therefore we have to endorse the eleven/nine dash lines; we would have to wait for a much stronger China and a very strong leader to relinquish that eleven/nine dash lines claim that we prefer not to explain. None of our current leaders can go down in history as having betrayed the national interest and done less than the Kuomintang”
The strategic importance of the South China Sea

“Hainan province is of little importance economically; **the South China Sea is all about Chinese national strategy**: in the past the threat came from the north and the west; now with the collapse of the Russian power, there is no Russian threat to China. In Xinjiang the threat is Islamic terrorism; but **our major threats are in the east from North Korea to Taiwan to the South China Sea**. The major threat is Taiwan independence; in the South China Sea, **the real security threat is the US presence with the US FONOPs**; China is developing a stronger Navy and Air Force with the need to develop a strategic nuclear base in the South China Sea”. 
The South China Sea as China’s most secure strategic sanctuary?

- Estimates on China’s new JL-2 strategic missile give a range of 7,500 km which is not enough to strike US soil from the South China Sea where China has its second strategic submarine base.

- As early as 2013, Chinese sources referred to a future modified JL-2A with a range of 9,500 to 10,500 km with 3 warheads (“11,000 under some circumstances”/a single warhead).

- Conditions in the South China Sea are more favorable (bad weather, poor ASW performances in warm waters) to access the Western Pacific Sea through the Bashi strait.
China’s views on why the conflict has become more severe in the South China Sea

“The reasons why conflicts have become more severe: Because of the US rebalance/pivot strategy ... through legal warfare ... the US criticizes China for its historical rights; it claims to preserve its freedom of navigation; the US encourages and sponsors other countries to take very aggressive measures towards China; multilateralization, regionalization, legalization and internationalization are key words to describe the South China Sea; in 2009, the Philippines changed its law on the coastal baseline and claimed part of those islands in the Nansha; ... in 2009, Vietnam and Malaysia submitted the case of demarcation of the continental shelf in the southern part to the UNCLOS committee on continental shelf; in 2013, the Philippines asked for an arbitration and the process of internationalization became irreversible”.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Why land reclamations?

“at the end of 2013, China decided to initiate the land reclamation. We were being challenged aggressively by the Obama administration and we responded with the land reclamation”
Why land reclamations?

"The land reclamation was about the US return to the Philippines but it was also a political maneuver to increase Chinese presence and visibility in the South China Sea; China has now a say because it has artificial islands there; it is not only military because of the US pressure, it is also political, so that China may have a say with the Southern neighbors".
The US-China confrontation in the South China Sea

“The US conducts FONOP in the South China Sea, in essence to spy on us; therefore, FONOP is detrimental to our national security”.

Scholar 2, May 2017

“We are worried about the so-called free navigation activities of non-relevant countries that come as far as near five to six nautical miles of the reefs where our staffs are stationed”.

China as a « strong maritime country » and not as an hegemonic « sea power »?

“We have different logics; in Chinese we don't use the word power and therefore the notion of sea power. China is not a sea power in the Western sense of hegemonic sea power. **China is a strong country and is becoming a strong maritime country** [海洋强国]. **Power** [权力] is close to hegemony [霸权] and shares one character; but strong country does not contain the character for hegemony“.
China “a strong maritime country”… with the instruments of Sea Power

Thanks to improved air defense & ASW, the Chinese Navy has broken the 200 NM limitation for its operations previously limited to the radius of the land based aviation and it is building a global Navy

• Since 2002, China has completed 50 major surface combatants: 1 carrier, 22 destroyers – including 20 fitted with long range air defense missiles HQ-9, SA-N-6 and 29 missile frigates, including 27 fitted with the medium range HQ-16 air defense missile. Most of those escorts are equipped with towed arrays that give them an anti-submarine warfare capability previously non-existent.

• Up to the commissioning of the carrier and the air defense destroyers and the frigates armed with long range missiles, Chinese naval vessels could not defend themselves beyond the 200 nautical miles covered by the land based naval aviation. Since then, new Chinese platforms have given the PLAN an ability to operate in the 500-1000 nautical miles’ radius beyond the first islands’ chain.
China’s improved monitoring of the South China Sea
China’s maritime policies and the South China Sea

A long term vision or a reactive policy to external factors?
A long term vision or a reactive policy?

• China’s maritime awareness upgrades the status of maritime rights in China’s peaceful development.

• In October 1992, the report of the Party’s 14th Congress mentioned the role of the Army in safeguarding the sovereignty of national territorial land, airspace and waters and the maritime rights.

• In March 1995, the report on the work of the government set out the basic task of safeguarding maritime rights for the first time.

• In May 1995, China issued the “national maritime development plan” [全国海洋开发规划].

• In 1996, China issued the “9th Five year plan and the outline of the long term objectives in 2010” [国民经济与社会发展九五计划和2010年远景目标纲要]. In this document, China upgraded for the first time the ocean to an important status concerning the national development for the first time.

• In 1996, China drafted China’s maritime 21st Century Agenda [中国海洋21世纪议程].

• In 1998, China published “China’s maritime policy” [中国海洋政策] and has issued a white paper named, “the development of China’s maritime work-affairs/enterprise”[中国海洋事业的发展] by the State’s council news office.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
A long term vision or a reactive policy?

• In 2003, the State Council issued the outlines on the development of a national marine economy, putting forward the concept of maritime strong country as a strategic objective.

• In 2006, the 11th Five years plan clearly mentioned safeguarding China’s maritime rights.

• In 2007, the Party’s 17th Congress clearly mentioned the requirement of developing maritime industry.

• In 2011, the 12th Five year plan clearly set out the priority to “stick to the integration of land and sea, draft and implement maritime development strategies, and strengthen the capacity of maritime development, control and comprehensive management”.

• In 2012, the report of the Party’s 18th Congress, clearly set out that it should strengthen marine resources development capacity, develop the marine economy, protect marine ecological environment, firmly safeguard national maritime rights and build a maritime strong country.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
A long term vision or a reactive policy?

“We are in Thucydides' trap. Our policy is defensive and reactive because we don't act as a power in the US sense. We react. And we are a strong country. And the US is afraid of our rise. We have two different strategic cultures and different priorities: our concern is domestic; we want to preserve what we consider as the domestic order; the US concern is the international order, to preserve their hegemony”. 
A long term vision or a reactive policy?

“There was no real long-term planning for the Navy.... The naval strategic thinking of 1985 did not go beyond the Liu Huaqing’s working group, even though today it appears falsely as the beginning of a great long-term plan. Unlike other nations, China does not think in the long term. China reacts with emotions, and makes decisions under the pressure of events: the Taiwan crisis, the bombing of the Belgrade's embassy, the EP-3, Japanese arrogance etc. ... In addition, the decision-making process depends on our President. There is no Congress that allocates resources, takes initiatives, like in the USA. In Belgrade [1999 Chinese Embassy bombing], the Americans could not be wrong and we understood that. It had a lot of significance realizing to what extent they could go and that they did not care about Chinese lives. China understood that day that it was necessary to prepare for war against the USA and build up a Navy”.
China’s maritime policies and the South China Sea

Structures and decision making
China’s decision making process on Maritime Policies

• The “Central national party group” deals with foreign affairs, the Taiwan issue, Macau, Hong Kong. The “Central national party group” should be the coordinator for crisis management.

• Following a lack of coordination in 2012-13, China created a “Maritime rights small leading group” or “Small leading group on protecting maritime interests”.

• The State Oceanic Administration is responsible for drafting laws and regulations concerning sea area uses, environmental protection, scientific research and island protection in China’s internal sea, territorial waters, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and other sea areas. It is also responsible for drafting plans with relevant departments on strategic development of the sea and its main functional zones, and plans on environmental protection, marine economic development, island protection and development of uninhabited islands.
China’s decision making process on Maritime Policies: conflicts of interests among administration

- The Chief of Coast Guards is deputy minister of the Ministry for Public Security (MPS) with ministerial rank while the head of the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) has only vice-ministerial rank. The former China Marine Surveillance (CMS) thought they could swallow the three other dragons but the MPS has actually a higher position than SOA.

- The Ministry of Environment is in charge of coordinating the implementation of the environmental protection law on land but in each province SOA implements its maritime policy through its three representations in the North, the East and the South. They work with the relevant departments in the provinces. They put in place the protection zones through the “function zoning”.

- The department of the Ministry of Foreign affairs (MOFA) may disagree with the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM).

- Everyone gets guidelines without detailed instructions for policy implementation. Therefore, Chinese polices tend to be too reactive because China has no real strategic development guidelines. China is historically passive, reacting when pushed around.
Is the South China Sea important economically after all
Resources in the South China Sea: fisheries

• The distribution of China’s resources decreases from the south to the north. The density is higher in near shores and lower in off shores areas. SCS has abundant biological resources: 5613 marine organisms in the SCS. The maximum sustainable fishing production in the SCS is 4.72 million tons [the highest in China].

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Resources in the South China Sea: Oil and gas

• In 2014, China discovered large scale oil and gas fields in the South China Sea, South East Hainan Basin, deep water areas, Lingshui sunken which are 7-2 [陵水] and the Lingshui 25-1 which is a natural gas field about medium size. Lingshui 17-2 works at an average depth of 1500 meters and it has proved reserves of natural gas more than 100 billion cubic meters. Lingshui 25-1 works at an average depth of 900 meters with a production of natural gas of 35.6 million cubic foot per day which is nearly one million cubic meters. And it produces crude oil, 395 barrels per day. The two discoveries have proven that the South East Hainan Basin has great potential for oil and gas exploration. After discovering the large oil fields Lingshui-17/2 to the north of the SCS, in the end of 2014, the CIAOC, self-run deep water exploration, discovered another natural gas field above medium side which is 25/1. This discovery again proves the great exploration potential of the basing in South East Hainan.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
“On 18/8/2014, the deep water drilling platform called Marine Oil 981 (海洋石油981), has achieved a high production in its exercise in the deep water area of the SCS with a daily production of 1.6 million cubic meters. This is milestone for China’s deep water exploration and the success of this platform has achieved three first: the first high production large scale gas field that it independently carried out by China’s marine oil deep water exploration, it is also the first deep water exercise of the 981 platform which is a success; it is also the first time to utilize the independently developed deep water module test equipment.”

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Resources in the South China Sea: flammable ice

- The national gas hydrate is also called flammable ice [可燃冰]. The main element of flammable ice is methane with more than 99% of methane. So it produces much less pollution than coal, oil and natural gas which is a highly efficient clean energy. The seabed natural gas hydrate is usually distributed below 200 to 800 meters depths underwater. It is usually reserved in continental slopes, islands slopes, and the surface sediments or sedimentary rocks of basin. According to exploration, China has made the northern continental slope of the South China Sea [南海北部陆坡], the Nansha trough [南沙海槽], the Xisha trough [西沙海槽].

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Resources in the South China Sea: temperature difference energy

- China’s near shore reserves of temperature difference energy is 367.13 million kW, 25.7 million kW are technologically available. The SCS has the richest temperature difference energy because of its low latitude water depth and sea area width. Its reserves account for more than 90% of the total temperature difference energy reserve. The temperature difference between the surface seawater and the deep sea water in the SCS is large, so it has good conditions and prospects for power generation.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Can Joint development and OBOR solve the South China Sea dispute?
OBOR and the South China Sea: a way to resolve the dispute?

• “The first region is ASEAN, the most important one and the region around South China Sea. They all have borderlines with China. The Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei are all countries surrounding the SCS. ASEAN countries have actively responded to the 21st silk road initiative: Xi said in October 2013: South Eastern regions have been important hub since ancient times of the Silk Road of the Sea; China wishes to enhance maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to make a good use of the fund set up by the Chinese government and to build a good maritime cooperation partnership for a mutual Silk Road of the Sea”.

State Oceanic Administration’s Annual Report, 2016
Joint development and OBOR in the South China Sea

“OBOR is bringing joint development; China’s leadership is considering the issue now in the global picture; President Xi has attached a lot of significance to global governance; if we consider and deal with the South China Sea in the global picture; maybe the Code of Conduct could promote joint development; so far we have cooperation in areas of low sensitivity; disaster monitoring; environmental monitoring”
Joint development in the South China Sea?

“We should give due credit to the bilateral approach with South Korea. It is working. With the Philippines, we have had arrangements, the most recent one with Duterte. Those fishery arrangements have a high degree of pragmatism. There has been an example of trilateral Vietnam-China-Philippines cooperation where three companies conducted a joint seismic research on the oil and gas. It was a good example and it ended in 2008 because of the Philippines.”
OBOR, ASEAN...: OBOR as evidence of China’s peaceful intentions in the South China Sea and in the world...threatened by US naval presence in the South China Sea?

• “Without friendly neighbors there will be no future for the One Belt One Road initiative and this is our priority; so it will play an essential role; the current situation in the South China Sea will depend on the domestic situation in the US and in the Philippines. What will happen with Duterte? another problem is the US domestic situation: Trump may be impeached and China may not be able to meet Trump’s expectations. And the US may chose to return to the confrontation in the South China Sea”.