



**Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies
Policy Alert #75- May 15, 2014**

Asian Powers Voice Concerns over Heightened Tensions in South China Sea

Tensions in the South China Sea have significantly increased over the last several days, following a standoff between Vietnamese and Chinese coast guards over a Chinese oil rig and the Philippine maritime police's arrest of Chinese fishermen for alleged poaching in the disputed waters. This has led ASEAN leaders to jointly express "[serious concerns](#)" and call for restraint over territorial disputes in the region. In this Policy Alert, we examine commentary from China, Japan, India, and South Korea on the recent development in the South China Sea.

CHINA

Chinese newspapers slammed Vietnam and the Philippines for infringing on China's territorial integrity, while simultaneously criticizing ASEAN for its involvement in the conflict.

- "The Vietnamese harassment is a serious violation of international law and a severe infringement upon Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, and, as it [jeopardizes normal navigation security, also puts regional navigation freedom in danger](#)," stated the government-run *Xinhua*.
- Jia Xiu Dong, research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, criticized the ASEAN statement, arguing that "the issue of the South China Sea is not one between China and ASEAN. It is a territorial dispute between China and specific ASEAN countries...It should therefore be addressed directly by the parties involved through peaceful negotiations. The ASEAN meeting is [not an appropriate occasion](#) to discuss the South China Sea issue."
- "The islands disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea are a battle for national interests. They have led to a strategic game between China and the U.S.," said an op-ed in the *Global Times*.
- "The Philippines tough stance was not taken on a whim: their confidence to challenge China on the South China Sea issue stems from the [belief that they have the protection and support of the U.S.](#)," wrote *People's Daily* writer Su Xiaohui. A *China Daily* editorial also noted that the timing of the incident follows U.S. President Barack [Obama's recent visit](#) to Asia.

JAPAN

Japanese officials and newspapers unanimously condemned China's behavior.

- Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga criticized China's action as "[a unilateral and provocative maritime advancement](#)," [showing support](#) for ASEAN leaders' calls for restraint and a de-escalation of the tensions between China and Vietnam.
- "If things don't improve, the seas in East Asia will become [theaters of conflict](#) among regional powers," *Asahi Shimbun*

warned the . "China, which is responsible for this situation, should back down first. We also urge Vietnam to keep calm in responding to the situation."

- The *Yomiuri Shimbun* claimed "boosting the relationships of alliance between the United States and Asia, along with Pacific nations including the Japan-U.S., U.S.-Australia and U.S.-Philippine alliances, will be the [most effective deterrent](#) against China."
- "The United States...should [play a key role](#) in deterring any armed conflict and ensuring stability in the region," argued the *Mainichi Shimbun*, urging Japan to work closely with the U.S. and ASEAN to strengthen international security rules through regional forums.
- The *Sankei Shimbun* agreed, calling on the Japanese government to [back ASEAN's efforts](#) to unite against China through the East Asian Summit and security cooperation.

INDIA

India's response to the territorial disputes received differing reactions from China and Vietnam.

- A spokesman in the India External Affairs Ministry said "We have been [following with concern](#) recent developments in the South China Sea. We believe that maintenance of peace, stability, growth and prosperity in the region is of vital interest to the international community."
- Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying downplayed India's concern. "I have stated China's position on the South China Sea so many times. I wish to tell the Indian people that they should [not worry too much](#) about the current situation in the South China Sea."
- Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy, president of Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, welcomed India's interests in the region. Expressing "deep concerns" with Chinese assertiveness and the lack of clarity in the Obama administration's Asia policy, Quy emphasized "we want India [to] [rise quickly](#). We have great expectations from India."
- In response to Quy's comment, Australia-India Institute inaugural director Amitabh Mattoo argued that although "Beijing believes that its time has come and it wants to exercise hegemony over the whole region...this behavior is [shortsighted and counterproductive](#)."

SOUTH KOREA

Korean media expressed concerns over China's behavior in the South China Sea.

- The South China Sea is turning into a "[powder keg](#)" due to Chinese assertiveness, argued the *JoongAng Ilbo*, adding that Korea "is also involved in the situation" because Chinese fishing boats are operating illegally in the West Sea between the two countries.
- The newspaper also raised concerns over the future of China's rise. "China could overtake the United States and become the No. 1 economy in the world. But a giant that is not respected by its neighbors is [nothing but a threat](#)."

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