

**GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA:
ANALYZING CHINA’S EXPANSION AND THE QUAD INFLUENCE,
WITH INSIGHTS FROM CHINA’S PRESIDENT ABSENCE FROM THE
G20 SUMMIT 2023**

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ABSTRACT

China’s expansion in South China Sea (SCS) and on the territory of its neighboring states is well known. China’s territorial claims and expanding influence in the South China Sea have sparked concerns among the neighboring states and the global community. The formation of QUAD consisting of four countries like India, US, Japan and, Australia emerged as a significant player in the South China Sea. All these states specially US is actively playing role to challenge the China in expansion of its territory in South China Sea. China not only violating the rights of its neighboring states by expanding its territory in South China Sea but also violating the provisions of United Nations Convention on the Law of the sea (UNCLOS) and the refusal of Permanent Court of Arbitration award reflects China’s power to become a superpower against US. The recent absence of China in G20 summit which is the first time when China skipped any G20 summit, shows the world that its powerful state and the bordering issues with its neighboring states may not be resolved. This abstract provides a comprehensive overview of the complex geopolitical dynamics in the South China Sea. It underscores the significance of China’s expansionist agenda, the role of the QUAD in countering it, and the China’s politics by absence from the G20 summit 2023. As tension persist and regional alliances evolve, understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending the broader implications on international relations and the global order.

Keywords- South China Sea, China, Geo-politics, G20 summit etc.

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I. INTRODUCTION

China located in East Asia and a most populated nation in the world after India. In the last 30-40 years China emerged as an economic power by adopting new industrial policies for its industrial growth, today all over the world we can buy the Chinese products at reasonable price, this is how the China captured the world market. China not only emerged as an economic power but also emerging as a superpower because of its advancement in areas like technology, nuclear weapon, space, economy etc.

China expanding its control in Asian regions, like it exercising its sovereignty in South China Sea (SCS), expanding its territory over its neighboring states like India, Nepal, Laos, Myanmar. The China is expanding in such way that it become a threat not only for Southeast Asian regions but also for states which are dependent on South China Sea for their trade purposes and violating the international law.

China is emerging as a superpower after US. China's expansion in its bordering states and the water bodies is a matter of concern for the neighboring states of China. The sovereignty of South China Sea is a disputed one, mainly the conflict is related to two islands Spratly and Paracel islands, the main conflict over South China Sea and the interest of claimant and other states is that the South China Sea is rich in natural resources like minerals, natural gas, living and non-living resources this is the main reason of the dispute between China and the states like Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. South China Sea is not only rich in natural resources but also an important trade route. China claims its sovereignty over South China Sea on the basis of some historical records.

China claims that it has control over the South China Sea since ages it claims its sovereignty from Qing dynasty and proving the same through some books of travellers who mention about South China Sea, they claim that they found some pottery and other things from the Spratly and Paracel islands through archaeological survey. China also published its map in which it marked nine- dash line on South China Sea and excluding the claimant states from exercising its sovereignty over South China Sea.

II. SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE AND CHINA'S NEIGHBORING STATES BORDER ISSUES

South China Sea is semi-enclosed sea which covers a wide area of the Southeast Asian region. The South China Sea is always been a disputed sea since long time. The states like Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, and Brunei claims their right is the South China Sea against the China. The basic claim of China over the sea is based on its historical facts, it claims that China has sovereignty over South China Sea since their Qing dynasty till now. There was never one state who exercise the sovereignty over the South China Sea. When Europeans came to Asia, they started their business in the region and used sea routes for trade purposes then before World War II the France claims the area and established its administration there. Japan also controlled the South China Sea but after Sino-Japan treaty 1952 Japan renounced all its rights from South China Sea, China claimed that after Japan's renunciation of its rights the sea came into control of China. But now the neighboring states of China claim the South China Sea based on its rights under United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)1982.

China marked the nine-dash line in its map and claim the whole South China Sea as its own but according to UNCLOS the rights of other states is violated by China by marking the nine-dash line and the map is published by China in with different lines and at different times. First there were eleven lines in the map which was published in 1947 and now it has nine-dash line, these lines are doubtful for exercising the sovereignty and making it historical evidence to show the continuity of sovereignty over SCS through ages these maps has no relevance in international law. Under the UNCLOS it is given that every coastal state can enjoy its territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles (nm) from baselines as its territorial sea, then 24 nm from baseline as continental shelf and 200 nm from baselines as its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) then the contiguous zone has enforcement jurisdiction for special purpose like, custom, fiscal, immigration or sanitary purposes only but not exceeds 24 nm from territorial sea from baseline. High seas are those areas where no state has jurisdiction and states without disturbing the peace of other states can pass their ships through this area.

Here, China violating the rights of those states who claims their sovereignty over the South China Sea based on the provisions of UNCLOS. In the year 2016 the decision was given by Permanent Court of Arbitration in Philippines case in which it was decided that China is violating the rights of Philippines over the SCS and the historical evidences on which China

claims its sovereignty has no basis in international law, even after the judgment the China is still controlling the SCS and continuing the construction on the Islands. This reaction of China poses a serious threat not only for its claimant states but also for those non-claimant states whose trade is passes through the South China Sea.

China not only expanding its sea routes but also entered the land territory directly or indirectly of its neighboring states like India, Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar. China shares the border with India and Line of Actual Control (LAC) is divided the borders of India and China but still both the States have border issues.

China emerging as a superpower after US this rise of China in the Southeast Asian region is the threat to the security of its neighboring states. China is rising economically, geo-politically, building its military bases in the South China Sea poses threat not only to its neighboring states but also to the world superpower US also. China not only extending its territory in South China Sea but also expanding to its neighboring states like India, Nepal.

A. India

India sharing its long border with China, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) demarcates the separation of China and India border, but it is not agreed-upon or well-defined boundary. The lack of demarcations led to tensions in the regions. Recently, China entered in the Indian regions Arunachal Pradesh and eastern Ladakh where the soldiers of both sides died in the fight China is not encroaching in these parts but also constructing their roads and India is in difficult position because of its less military power than China to restrain them. According to the principles of International Law, unilateral declarations possess legal significance, and the Law of Treaties extensively addresses issues related to such statements made by nations. Nevertheless, when unilateral declarations impact the rights of other countries, they need to meet a two-step criterion for legal validity: firstly, there must be a statement made by a state entity that influences an international matter; secondly, this declaration must either gain acceptance from a concerned party or remain unopposed. As a result, the Chinese perspective on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) lacks a robust foundation in International Law because India has explicitly disapproved of it.¹ China's claim is same as SCS over

¹ Utkarsh Pandey, *The India-China Border Question: An Analysis of International Law and State Practices*, ORF Occasional Paper No. 290, OBSERVER RESEARCHER FOUNDATION (Sept.11, 2023, 9:29 PM) https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-india-china-border-question/#_edn15.

Aksai Chin based on its historical evidence and continuity in the region but analysts do not consider the China's sovereignty over Aksai Chin and invalidates its claim. The recent published map by China in which it includes the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh in its territory shows China's violation of international laws and security threat to other neighboring states.

B. Nepal

Same is happening in Nepal, Nepal lies in between the two major countries India and China, due to its location it plays a significant role for both the countries. In some remote regions of Nepal, the People's Liberation Army (PAL) of China entered to its territory and constructing buildings on the Nepal-China border.

C. Myanmar

The nation like Myanmar & Laos the China has good relations with them and invested US\$113 million in Myanmar.² When Myanmar got independence in 1948 it has some agreements with China, due to its economic weaknesses Myanmar heavily depend upon China and China has three interest in Myanmar (1) energy procurement and energy security (2) access to the Indian Ocean and (3) security of the border areas and border trade and due to this China has invested millions of dollars in Myanmar and making its strong position in the region. Now Myanmar wanted to depend less upon China and tie strong relationship with western countries for this reason Japan and US supports this initiative of Myanmar.

D. Laos

Laos is the only landlocked country in the Southeast Asia. The country's border with China is mainly of mountains and waters. These two countries have very good relations in terms of economic and trade relations. China and Laos have maintained close relationship over the years, characterized by political, economic, and strategic cooperation. China is one of the Lao's largest trading partner and investor, supporting infrastructure projects and development initiatives. The two countries often collaborate on regional issues and share

² Mikael Gravers, *China's Support in Myanmar Driven by Self-Interest*, EAST ASIA FORUM (Sept. 11, 2023, 11:35PM) <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/06/17/chinas-support-in-myanmar-driven-by-self-interest/>.

common interests, though their relationship has also raised some concerns about potential debt dependence and environmental impact in Laos. China given more than \$800 billion to the infrastructure in Laos.³ It is estimated like more than half of GDP of Laos is indebted to China.

The expansion of China in its neighboring states is a threat for the nations like India, Vietnam, Nepal etc., just to cease these activities of China the nations started protest against China and making anti-China groups. States like Vietnam and India always protest against China, Vietnam opposes China for its expansion in SCS and also these two states have their own rivalries. India too against the China for its illegal expansion in the Arunachal Pradesh, Aksai Chin region. India restricts the direct trade with China and bans Chinese products in India. These states opposed China for its illegal expansion & violation of the provisions of international law in SCS. China's rising power in all spheres is a threat not only for neighboring nations but also to US and other states.

III. FORMATION OF QUAD

QUAD referred to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal strategic forum comprising four countries: the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. The QUAD's primary objective is to promote a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. It has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential implications for regional security, trade, and geopolitics. The primary purpose of the QUAD is to address regional challenges and enhance cooperation on various issues, including maritime security, counterterrorism, infrastructure development, and economic connectivity. The member countries share a common interest in ensuring stability and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, which is vital for their economic and security interests. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or QUAD, represents a significant development in regional geopolitics. As it evolves, its success will depend on the ability of its member countries to effectively address shared challenges, build trust, and promote cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The forum's impact on regional dynamics and its ability to maintain stability while upholding democratic values will be closely watched by the international community in the years to come.

³ Jesse Jiang, *Laos Faces Debt Crisis After Borrowing Billions From China*, EAST ASIA (Sept.5, 2023, 11 AM) <https://www.voanews.com/a/laos-faces-debt-crisis-after-borrowing-billions-from-china-/6641633.html>.

The South China Sea is a region of significant geopolitical importance, and its impact on the Quad countries can be observed in several key areas:

Security Concerns: The South China Sea is home to multiple territorial disputes involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Brunei. China has asserted its territorial claims by building artificial islands, militarizing features, and engaging in aggressive actions. These actions have raised concerns about regional stability and maritime security for the Quad countries. As a result, the Quad nations have been closely monitoring the situation and increasing cooperation in maritime security and freedom of navigation operations to counter any potential threats.

Geostrategic Balance: The South China Sea is a critical maritime trade route, with a significant portion of the world's trade passing through its waters. The Quad countries view the region as crucial for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific and preventing any attempts by China to dominate the sea lanes and exert control over regional trade routes. Consequently, the Quad has advocated for upholding international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to promote a rules-based order in the region.

Economic Interests: The South China Sea contains valuable fisheries and potential energy reserves, making it an essential economic resource for many countries in the region, including Quad members. Any escalation of tensions or conflict in the area could disrupt economic activities and energy supplies, impacting the Quad countries' economies and energy security.

Diplomatic Alignment: The South China Sea disputes have pushed the Quad countries closer together as they share common concerns about China's assertiveness in the region. By addressing regional security issues collectively, the Quad aims to demonstrate a united front and present a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Strengthening Partnerships: The South China Sea issue has prompted the Quad countries to strengthen their partnerships with other regional nations with shared interests in a stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific. This has led to enhanced engagement with ASEAN countries and other maritime nations to foster cooperation and maintain regional stability.

It is important to note that geopolitical dynamics can evolve rapidly, and new developments may have occurred beyond my last update. The impact of the South China Sea on the Quad

countries is subject to ongoing changes, depending on the actions of the involved parties and the broader geopolitical context in the Indo-Pacific region.

IV. CHINA'S ABSENCE IN G20 SUMMIT 2023

G20 Summit was held in New Delhi from 8 – 10 September 2023. All the QUAD countries attended the summit but Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador did not attend. This is the first time that Chinese President is absent from the G20 summit in India. Chinese President absence raises many questions among the states specially for US. Most of the states in the Southeast Asian region is an ally of US and they want US support for many reasons and the one reason is China also. U.S. deputy director said that Chinese President absence indicates that it is giving up on the G20 and building an alternative world order.⁴

The reason for not attending the summit by Chinese President may be the border dispute with India or may be because of the latest BRICS summit where China releases the statement in which it is said that both the states should bear in mind the overall interest bilateral relations and handle properly the border issues so as to maintain the peace and stability in the region but China on 28 August 2023 released the map in which the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region of India as its own not only this but again China include the Taiwan and South China Sea in its map. China did the same this time as it was done previously to publish map where nine-dash line was marked to take the sovereignty of South China Sea and excluding the control of other claimant states. This may be the reason for not attending the G20 summit by China this year.

V. CONCLUSION

China is making its control over the weak nations of the Southeast Asian region and trying to control them by expanding its territory and making illegal official records by publishing the maps where the part of Indian region in its own territory and also SCS. All these activities of China is for its own interest only by taking advantage of being a powerful nation in the South east Asian region over the nations who are weaker than China. Here, this is also the threat to the US because China is expanding in Southeast Asian region and challenging US in this

⁴ Nandita Bose, *It is for China to explain Xi's absence from G20 summit*, US official says, THOMSON REUTERS, (Sept. 9, 2023, 5 PM).

region, due to the alliance with nations like Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam to protect and secure their territory the US confronting the China's expansion over South China Sea and also making strong ties with states like Myanmar, Laos to protect them from China's evil intentions to expand in their territories. Currently, China do not have good relations with any of its neighboring states because these nations have an insecurity from China from the activities which it has done in past few years whether it is South China Sea or entering to the land territory of India and Nepal. China also plays "debt trap" against Laos, now the states is recovering but still it is under debt to China which is half of its GDP.

Lastly, China not only emerging as a superpower but also posing a threat to the security of its bordering states and also to the claimant states of South China Sea. China's absence in the recent G20 summit and the publishing of maps where China shows the Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai China within its border which is a disputed border between China and India reflects the bad intentions of China that the border dispute will not be resolved. China's expansion in the Asia by violating the laws poses a challenge to the security of the states. US allies in South Asia may or may not help them to challenge the China's expansion. The position of China in South China Sea is very strong though the formation of QUAD and other Freedom of Navigation operations (FONOPs) by US makes a pressure on China but China holds a strong position in South Asia that it becomes difficult for the states to take any stand before China. States like Australia and Japan also challenging China for its expansion in South China Sea by sending their aircraft carriers but their operations are not much successful.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

1. **Diplomatic Negotiations:** Prioritize diplomatic channels to resolve disputes peacefully. Engage in bilateral or multilateral talks to find mutually acceptable solutions.
2. **International Arbitration:** Consider pursuing international arbitration through organizations like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to settle disputes based on established legal principles.
3. **Multilateral Approach:** Strengthen partnerships with other claimant states and regional organizations to present a united front when dealing with China's claims.
4. **Confidence-Building Measures:** Implement confidence-building measures to reduce tensions, such as joint resource exploration or fisheries management agreements.

5. **Legal Framework:** Promote adherence to international laws and norms, including UNCLOS, as the basis for resolving disputes and establishing maritime boundaries
6. **Engagement with ASEAN:** Collaborate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate discussions and promote a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.
7. **Transparency:** Encourage transparency in military activities and resource development to build trust and reduce the risk of misunderstandings.
8. **Strengthen Naval Capabilities:** Invest in maritime security and defense capabilities to protect sovereign interests and deter potential aggression.
9. **Public Diplomacy:** Engage in public diplomacy efforts to garner international support for your claims and demonstrate China's non-compliance with international norms.
10. **Economic and Trade Leverage:** Explore economic and trade options to exert pressure on China, utilizing international economic forums and trade agreements.

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