

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > South China Sea: Vietnam Perceptibly Betrayed by the Philippines

South China Sea: Vietnam Perceptibly Betrayed by the Philippines

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Tue, 10/25/2016 - 05:14

Paper No. 6187

Dated 25-Oct-2016

By Dr Subhash Kapila

More than the United States it is Vietnam that stands perceptibly betrayed this week on South China Sea dispute solidarity against China, with new Philippines President Duterte declaring his strategic and political illogical tilt to China.

China perceptibly again seemed to have exploited the mercurial impulses of President Duterte and lavishly feted him in Beijing to induce him to declare his strategic preference for China and the wish of the Filipino President to reach out to President Putin of Russia. More significantly, the Filipino President asserted in Beijing that he was “separating” with the United States which has recently been subjected to intemperate remarks against US President Obama by President Duterte.

It needs to be highlighted that it was the Philippines which went to The Hague International Arbitration Tribunal challenging China’s sovereignty over the South China Sea. In a landmark judgement, The Hague Tribunal ruled against China’s sovereignty claims over the South China Sea.

Implicit in this ruling was also the reality that China’s occupation of the Paracel and Spratly Islands was illegal and so also the construction of artificial islands to extend China’s military sway over the South China Sea. While China refused to abide by The Hague Tribunal judgement, an assertion that China had so made even before the judgement was announced, China’s international image as a responsible stake-holder in global security and stability stood not only dented but shattered.

It is therefore shocking that the Philippines under its new President should be seen as bac-tracking from its firmly-held positions on Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

In the backdrop of the above reality-check strategic analysis begs the questions that what does the Filipino President's assertions in favour of China against the United States and also implicitly isolating Vietnam on the South China Sea issues in favour of China amount to? Was the Filipino President's assertion against the United States and in favour of China was a personal decision? Did the Filipino President's such assertion was a national decision endorsed by the nation's Parliament and the Armed Forces who have been battling Chinese violations of Philippines maritime sovereignty and also China-inspired insurgencies? Lastly, was the Filipino President resorting to some bargaining with the United States? Was the Filipino President mindful of Vietnam's sensitivities with which the Philippines was coordinating till recently joint responses on the South China Sea dispute against China?

Tackling the last question first, it appears that the Philippines President was not at all mindful of Vietnam's strategic sensitivities in resorting to a U-turn on Philippines policies towards China. Not only the Filipino President perceptibly undermines Vietnam-Philippines solidarity on the South China Sea dispute, but also shredded the already tattered ASEAN unity on this dispute against China.

Regarding the remainder questions no reports exist that the Philippines policy changes asserted by ts President in Beijing carried the weight of the Parliament and the Armed Forces. It is therefore speculative at this stage to forecast as to how well received domestically in the Philippines would be the President's declaration that the Philippines would now be in the process of "separation" with the United States?

The United States needs to take a major share of the blame in letting a situation in the South China Sea dispute under constant turbulent stirring by China against Vietnam and the Philippines. Reflected in my writings for the last decade on the South China Sea conflict-escalation by China was the cautionary warning that lack of firm actions by United States on Chinese brinkmanship would be read as a sign of American weakness in facing China. This is was exactly what is happening presently, where China in whatever inducements to the Philippines it has made has been able to sway the Filipino President to the extent to renounce his country's "separation" from a seventy year old alliance with the United States.

The United States needs to initiate damage control forthwith and retrieve the Philippines to its original policy stances on the South China Sea dispute where China has aggressively ignored and violated Philippines maritime sovereignty. The US presidential elections interlude cannot be allowed to be exploited by China against US national security interests.

Vietnam may have foreseen this contingency arising with the advent of a new Filipino President assuming power in Manila with heavily anti-US stances, and formulated its appropriate responses for the future, though these would not be in the public domain presently.

Vietnam may be impelled to move more swiftly and more substantively into a much stronger strategic partnership with the United States. Vietnam's ideological affinity with China has not paid any peace dividends to Vietnam and neither stemmed Chinese aggression against Vietnam.

Regrettably, some reports suggest that even Russia, the staunchest ally of Vietnam, recently conducted joint naval exercises with China in the contested region. That should add further pointers to the viability of Vietnam's relations with China, even if it is a hedging strategy.

China can be expected to add more fuel to the fire in the South China Sea from now till the election of and assumption of power of the new US President. China has the propensity to exploit political and strategic vacuums to its advantage.

In conclusion, what needs to be stressed is that ASEAN as a regional grouping has been unable to stand up to China unitedly and in solidarity with its those members being subjected to Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. The South China Sea is an "international issue" and the United Nations must step-in to ensure what China always constantly proclaims of ensuring a "rules based international order".

Tags:

[South China Sea](#) ^[1]

[China and Phillipines](#) ^[2]

[Vietnam](#) ^[3]

Category:

[Papers](#) ^[4]

Countries:

[China](#) ^[5]

Topics:

[Strategic Affairs & Security](#) ^[6]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2076>

Links

- [1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/329>
- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1543>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/410>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/china>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/strategic-affairs-and-security>