

**ABE SHINZO'S STRATEGIC OUTLOOK:
PREVENTING "LAKE BEIJING"
IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1155

Date of Publication: 21 July 2016

Executive Summary

1. The South China Sea (SCS) dispute is now an additional bone of contention between Beijing and Tokyo.
2. There appeared to be a slight thaw in Sino-Japanese relations after the Xi-Abe meeting in Bandung in April 2015. However bilateral relations worsened in 2016 after Tokyo raised its diplomatic and military profile in the SCS dispute.
3. Although Japan is not a claimant state in the SCS dispute, its involvement in the troubled waters is annoying if not worrisome to China. In April 2016, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Forces showed the flag in the SCS by dispatching a submarine accompanied by two destroyers to Subic Bay, the Philippines.
4. Commander of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris, Jr. said he welcomes regional navies, including Japan, to conduct patrols of international waters, including the SCS.
5. Despite initial speculation that the Self-Defence Force (SDF) may participate in joint patrols with the United States, the Abe administration has apparently taken note of Beijing's concern and refrained from doing so.
6. Tokyo perceives that the SCS dispute is intertwined with its East China Sea problem especially over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands with China. To Tokyo, the commonality in both maritime discord is that Beijing is seeking to change the status quo by force.
7. Abe Shinzo argued: "[T]he South China Sea seems set to become a 'Lake Beijing' ... Soon, the PLA Navy's newly built aircraft carrier will be a common sight – more than sufficient to scare China's neighbors. That is why Japan must not yield to the Chinese government's daily exercises in coercion around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea".

8. Abe's mentality and strategic intent are very clear: Tokyo will actively seek an alignment with like-minded partners to pressure China to abide by the international law and dissuade it from resorting to coercion in addressing maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas.