

**ABE ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY
AND POLICY TOWARDS THE
SOUTH CHINA SEA:
PREVENTING "LAKE BEIJING"**

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Executive Summary

1. The Abe administration has enacted a new legislative framework which permits Tokyo to assist Washington in the event of a South China Sea (SCS) conflict.
2. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo argued that “the SDF will be permitted to provide not only water and food but also ammunition and fuel to US forces confronting Chinese forces if Japan concludes that Chinese attacks on US forces post a ‘clear danger to Japan’s existence’, the use of force under the right to collective self-defense, or coming to the aid of the an ally under attack, will become an option for the government”.
3. In reality, it is very difficult for the Abe administration to claim that any accidental conflict in the SCS directly, gravely and imminently threatens the survival of Japan and therefore allowing the security bills to kick in.
4. Tokyo’s SCS strategy and policy are to support the Southeast Asian maritime states (especially the Philippines and Vietnam) in “capacity building” such as equipping their coast guards with patrol boats and planes for surveillance in the SCS, training their coast guard and naval personnel, and providing radar equipment and other monitoring devices.
5. Tokyo seeks to internationalise the SCS issue in its bilateral talks with various countries including India and Australia, and multilateral settings like the G7 to apply diplomatic pressure on Beijing.
6. In February 2016, at a Sino-Japanese vice-ministerial meeting held in Tokyo, the Chinese side warned Japan not to raise the SCS issue at the G7 meeting to be held at Ise-Shima in May 2016 but to no avail.
7. Infuriated, the Chinese media opined that “Beijing should not let the vain hope for ‘friendship’ to get in its way of coping with a now-very-different Japan: ... A Japan that seems prepared for long-term confrontation with China ... the truth is China-

Japan relations have just reached a watershed, and they are entering an era brimming with uncertainties”.

8. In reality, a few ASEAN non-claimant states may choose to “bandwagon” with China on the SCS and Tokyo’s recent efforts to embarrass Beijing in forums over the SCS dispute, provide more “capacity building” to some ASEAN states and reinforce its alliance with the United States may not prevent the SCS from becoming a “Lake Beijing” in the long run.
9. Much thus depends on the United States’ will, capability and credibility to be the key balancer in the SCS if Japan is to remain a keen supporter in those waters within the framework of their alliance.