

**JAPAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA
DISPUTE: SEEKING A MORE
ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLE**

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EAI Background Brief No. 756

Date of Publication: 27 September 2012

Executive Summary

1. Though Tokyo is not a claimant state in the South China Sea dispute, it is engaging Beijing directly through talks on the issue, supporting the US to balance China, and harnessing multilateral institutions to check perceived Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.
2. About 88% of the oil which powers Japan's industries passes through the South China Sea.
3. Tokyo also sees a link between the South China Sea and East China Sea disputes. Beijing's handling of the claimant states in the South China Sea may have implications for the East China Sea including the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) dispute.
4. Tokyo is proposing a rule-based maritime regime to ensure the safety and freedom of navigation, and the peaceful conflict resolution in the South China Sea to the chagrin of Beijing. Japan envisages an expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) which includes the dialogue partners of ASEAN.
5. Japan suggests the creation of a consultative body on maritime security comprising high government officials and experts. The envisioned scope of discussion includes the prevention of maritime conflicts, piracy and pollution of sea waters in the South China Sea.
6. However, China views the Japanese proposal to build a new maritime architecture for the South China Sea as "muddying the waters".
7. Japan is also bolstering the coast guards and naval capabilities of the Philippines and Vietnam (both claimant states in the South China Sea).

8. In 2011, Australia, Japan and the US conducted military exercises in the South China Sea off the coast of Brunei, a claimant state.
9. In the following year, Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF) participated in joint annual military exercises (Balikatan Exercise [shoulder to shoulder]) involving US and Filipino forces in the Philippines for the first time.
10. The Japanese media also reported that the US and Japanese governments are in discussion to dispatch US marine corps and the Japanese SDF to military training facilities in the Philippines in Luzon and Palawan, islands facing the South China Sea.
11. Tokyo risks arousing Chinese suspicions if it were to considerably increase its material and diplomatic support to Vietnam and the Philippines over the South China Sea dispute.