

**THE CHINA-VIETNAM CLASHES IN THE
SOUTH CHINA SEA: AN ASSESSMENT**

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Executive Summary

1. Confrontations between China and Vietnam reignited in early May 2014 due to an oil rig deployment in the area near the Paracel Islands. In mid May, demonstrations in Vietnam erupted, leading to rampant violence against Chinese and foreign industries.
2. China has handled well the information flow in the social media and other major media to cultivate measured rational nationalism and to avoid a sudden spike in public attention.
3. The Vietnamese demonstrators sparked off an “anti-China” protest, express their anger at domestic economic malaise, infighting of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and political instability in Vietnam.
4. The United States called for rational behavior and self-restraint, while the State Department expressed support for the protest rights of individuals.
5. While China is fine-tuning its South China Sea policy by providing alternatives, such as deepening economic exchanges and development cooperation, its People’s Liberation Army still prefers a bellicose position in the South China Sea issue. The gains in China’s economic overtures have been more than offset by its military assertiveness, an obvious bane to its diplomacy system.
6. Vietnam is also adjusting its South China Sea strategy to focus on its international propaganda activities and nourish an image of a victim in China’s growing prowess.
7. Vietnam opines that it is considering legal suits against China. To break the current stalemate, China may have to resort to the China-Vietnam consensus reached in October 2013.

8. Current development shows that risks of cooperating with countries with unstable domestic environment are important considerations. Vietnam and Thailand serve as good examples.
9. A recent positive turn of events took place when China's State Councilor Yang Jiechi paid a visit to Hanoi on 18 June 2014. Both China and Vietnam have demonstrated their willingness to search for a way out of the stalemate.
10. Overall, China needs to fine-tune its regional policy, and to conduct multifarious pursuits in cultivating a friendly and stable regional environment.