

**Geo-Strategy and the South China Sea Basin:
Regional Balance, Maritime Issues, Future Patterns**

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The South China Sea and its environs have in recent years been the scene of conflicts of strategic and tactical interest. It is an area where changes in the regional strategic environment are taking place.

The predominance of external powers, manifest since the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch, reached its height with U.S. intervention in Vietnam. With U.S. withdrawal, the imposition of Western political power has diminished to the extent that indigenous states are able to exert their influence to a degree unparalleled since the advent of colonialism — a new situation to which they have yet to fully adjust.

This study focuses on the relationship between the two major littoral states, China and Vietnam, and seeks to explain its relevance in the overall geo-strategic environment. The author puts forward the view that the China-Vietnam relationship is central to the regional balance and that China's interest in the region is the containment or delay of the growth of Vietnam's power.

The semi-enclosed South China Sea and its terrestrial environs are set out as a political and strategic milieu, which the author likens to a "geo-political lake", and where issues vitally affecting interaction between states and pointers to future options are discernible. Problems of ownership of sea space, transit and access, maritime resources both living and non-living, and the new Law of the Sea are analysed. Finally, the utility of present delimitations of "Southeast Asia" in the analysis of regional problems is questioned.

The author is a Research Officer at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. This book is issued under the auspices of the ISEAS.

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