

Relations among the United States, ASEAN and China have undergone significant changes in the past decade. Some of the salient factors behind these changes are: 1) increasing assertiveness by China in pressing its claims in the South China Sea; 2) resurgence of ASEAN's concerns about Chinese intentions and ambitions that has prompted support for increased US involvement and presence in the region; and 3) announcement by the United States of a strategic rebalance to Asia that includes economic, diplomatic, and military components. The South China Sea is at the center of the rebalancing of US-China-ASEAN relations. The territorial and maritime disputes have become a crucible of how China will treat its neighbors as it amasses greater comprehensive national power. The disputes have also posed a major challenge to ASEAN unity. In addition, they have presented a test of US policy, which has attempted to remain neutral on sovereignty matters, while pursuing a consistent set of principles in handling the South China Sea.



This paper will compare US-China-ASEAN relations in the 2002-2006 period with the subsequent 2007-2012 period and identify key changes and their consequences. Special attention will be paid to analyzing the South China Sea issue in US-China-ASEAN ties. The paper will conclude with some thoughts about the changing dynamics in US-China-ASEAN relations and the challenges for US policy in pursuing American interests in the region and in the South China Sea in particular.

The Early 2000s: China-ASEAN, US-ASEAN, and US-China Relations

China's Good Neighbor Policy

Written by vuquangtiép
Monday, 21 January 2013 08:12

Beijing's recognition of growing concerns among several Southeast Asian nations about China as both an economic and security threat prompted the adoption of a new approach toward the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s aimed at alleviating regional anxieties about Chinese hegemony and improving relations with Southeast Asian nations in general. [1]

During 1999-2000, Beijing signed cooperation framework agreements with each of the ten ASEAN states that set out road maps for economic, political, security, cultural, social and diplomatic cooperation into the 21

st

century. In November 2001, China and ASEAN member countries began negotiations to establish a free trade area. The adoption in November 2002 of the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) committed all signatories to seek peaceful solutions to disputes, avoid actions that would complicate or escalate disputes, conduct maritime cooperation, and negotiate a Code of Conduct. The signing of the DoC was instrumental in helping China to win greater trust and confidence from ASEAN members, which laid the foundation for further development of economic and trade relations.

[2]

The following year, China signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Chinese policy shifted away from employing military force and intimidation in favor of pursuing joint resource development in disputed South China Sea waters. In 2005 China, the Philippines and Vietnam signed a trilateral agreement for Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking in the South China Sea, which boosted hopes that Deng Xiaoping's policy of "shelving disputes and seeking joint development" could be realized.

In a speech delivered at the Bo'ao Forum in 2004, Hu Jintao described the importance of peaceful relations with neighbors in China's foreign policy, saying, "building good-neighborly relationships and partnership with the neighboring countries, we pursue a policy of bringing harmony, security and prosperity to neighbors and dedicate ourselves to strengthening mutual trust and cooperation with the fellow Asian countries, easing up hot spot tensions, and striving to maintain peace and tranquility in Asia." [3] The "Good Neighbor" policy [4] was designed to reduce fears in the region of a China threat and foster a peaceful and stable regional environment in which China can focus on economic development.

[5]

A 2005 State Council White Paper entitled "China's Peaceful Development Road" confirmed that the Good Neighbor policy would be central to Chinese foreign policy.

[6]

(continuing)

Read full text of this paper [here](#) .

* The author would like to thank Ryan Pope, CSIS Intern, for his research assistance in preparing this article.

[1] Glosny notes that the “China threat” theory initially referred to the increased economic competition Southeast Asian countries faced from China, and then started to include security issues. Michael Glosny, “Heading Toward a Win-Win Future? Developments in China’s Policy Toward Southeast Asia,” *Asian Security* 2, no. 1, (2006): doi: 10.1080/14799850600575199.

[2] Tran Truong Thuy, “Recent Developments in the South China Sea: Implications for Regional Security and Cooperation,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 30, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/recent-developments-south-china-sea-implications-regional-security-and-cooperation>

[3] “Full Text of Hu Jintao’s Speech at BFA Annual Conference 2004,” *Xinhua*, April 24, 2004, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/93897.htm>

[4] The Good Neighbor policy was referenced by Jiang Zemin in his speech to the 15th Party Congress in 1997. For the text of the speech, see Article IX of the following: “Jiang Zemin's Report at the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” Federation of American Scientists, September 12, 1997, <http://www.fas.org/news/china/1997/970912-prc.htm>

[5] Li Mingjiang, “China and Maritime Cooperation in East Asia: recent developments and future prospects” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19, no. 64, (March 1, 2010): doi: 10.1080/10670560903444249.

Written by vuquangtiep
Monday, 21 January 2013 08:12

[6] For more information on the “peaceful development” policy, see: China State Council Information Office, *White Paper: China's Peaceful Development Road* (Beijing, China: 2005), <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN023152.pdf>