



TALKING POINTS

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Talking Points for: Liu Lin, Academy of Military Science

In the past two decades, China-ASEAN cooperation has made abundant achievements. The relations in various fields between China and ASEAN are expanding continuously. However, the issue of South China Sea (SCS) has always been a disturbing factor in China-ASEAN relationship. In fact, the issue has long been regarded as one of the potential hotspots in East Asia. In recent years, with the issue heating up again, its negative impact on relations between China and ASEAN countries is becoming more apparent, although the overall China-ASEAN relationship is still stable. First, it makes the ASEAN countries to be more suspicious and worry about China, therefore reduces their mutual trust, especially between China and ASEAN claimants. Second, it allows the external powers to intervene and drive a wedge between China and ASEAN. The Obama administration, for example, has become more actively involved in the SCS issue, and regarded it as an important component of reengagement policy with Southeast Asia. Third, although it is unlikely to see a major warfare in this area, frictions or crises may break out more frequently.

In order to minimize the negative impact of the SCS issue on China-ASEAN relationship, China and ASEAN countries should make efforts in the following aspects: First, both China and ASEAN should take a long-term and future-oriented approach in addressing the dispute. Second, the claimant countries should adhere to the spirits of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) more strictly, and take into account of the other party's interests and concerns. Third, despite of the conflicting sovereign claims, China and ASEAN should continue to push for pragmatic functional cooperation in the SCS, such as joint development of resources, marine environmental protection, and marine scientific research. Fourth, China and ASEAN countries should adopt and implement confidence-building measures more actively. The defense establishment could get more involved in this aspect.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.