China's 'Peaceful Rise' Enters Turbulence

By Arthur Waldron

Arthur Waldron is the Lauder Professor of International Relations in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania, and an FPRI Senior Fellow. He is author, editor, or contributor to more than twenty books.

Abstract: This article seeks to place recent developments in China in a larger context through three arguments. First, Chinese military policy has indeed made a major turning over the past decade; second, this turning is based on a fragile and unrealistic strategy that is already eliciting counter-reactions that will make achievement of its apparent goals increasingly difficult. Finally, this strategy's failure will present China with unwelcome choices about how far to take her use of force. The "rise" of China is now encountering turbulence that may undo it.

Late 2013 and the beginning of 2014 brought a series of announcements and actions from China that indicated an increase in both diplomatic and military pressure against her neighbors, while also making manifest the difficulties China will encounter if she attempts to continue along her current course. China's new assertiveness is being steadily chronicled by many observers, perhaps most importantly by a group of scholars at the United States Naval War College.[1]

A partial list of the sorts of actions with which we are concerned could well begin with the military seizure of the Paracel Islands from South Vietnam in 1974, and of the Vietnamese-controlled Johnson South Reef in the Spratly Islands in 1988.[2] The list would continue through the occupation of Mischief Reef, in

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[1] I refer to Professors Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes of the U.S. Naval War College's Department of Strategy and Policy, and Professor Andrew S. Ericson of the Strategic Research Department and China Maritime Studies Institute, whose numerous writings are of cardinal importance.

[2] For a convenient summary see "Territorial Conflicts in the South China Sea," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territorial_disputes_in_the_South_China_Sea.

Philippine waters in 1994, and construction there of military facilities. It would move to the 2012 attempt to detach Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines, in which, reportedly, the United States brokered an agreement by which both sides would withdraw and negotiate. The Philippine forces accordingly withdrew but the Chinese did not, thus leaving the shoal effectively under Chinese military control.[3] In 2010 came the announcement that China considered the South China Sea (a Western term; in Chinese this body of water, bigger than the Mediterranean, is called simply "Southern Sea" [*Nanhai* 南海]) a core interest comparable to Tibet and

(This map was produced by Steven D. Schindler.)

Taiwan.[4] In 2012, there were also waves of massive anti- Japanese demonstrations, evidently officially sponsored, in Beijing and other Chinese cities.[5] On November and

[3]Keith Bradsher,"Philippine Leader Urges International Help in Resisting China's Sea Claims," *New York Times,* Feb. 4, 2014,
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/05/world/asia/philippine-leader-urges-international-help-in-resisting-chinas-sea-claims.html?_r=0.
[4] Li Hongmei, "Unwise to Elevate South China Sea to Core Interest?" *People's Daily Online,* Aug. 27, 2010, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/96417/7119874.html.
[5] Ian Johnson and Thom Shanker, "Beijing Mixes Messages over Anti-Japanese Demonstrations," *The New York Times,* Nov. 16, 2012,
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/17/world/asia/anti-japanese-protests-over-disputed-islands-continue-in-china.html?_r=0.