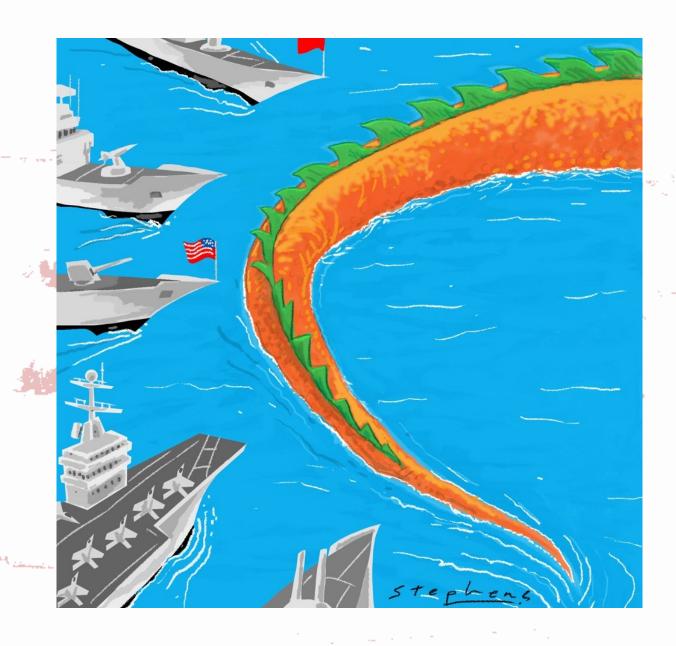


# Regional conflicts: US and South China Sea

Luboš Přikryl & Tomáš Daněk

#### What is it about?

- South China sea presents very lucrative area
- Oil reserves, gas reserves, fish populations, and viable trade routes
- According to UN law, large part of the SCS is international waters
- UN Maritime law declares international waters cant be claimed
- China doesn't respect the 200 miles rule
- China enforces historical 9 dash border (and with it resources of SCS)



### What is it about?

- This puts China at odds with other actors in the region
- Those actors are US allies or partners
- China backs its claims with military buildup
- Other regional powers uneasy
- Some of these (South Korea, Japan) directly relies on US for defense



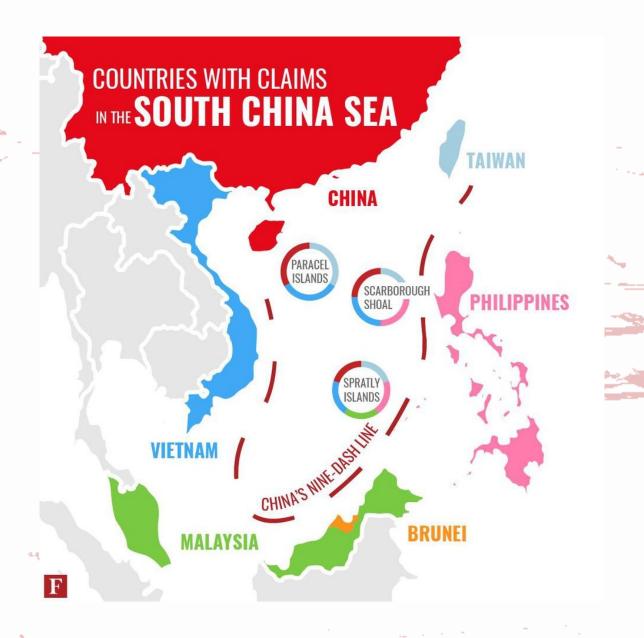
# **Chinese Military buildup**

- South Chinese sea contains no real landmass
- Only sandy archipelagos
- "Little blue men"
- China is expanding these archipelagos
- ...and building military bases on them
- This way, step by step,
  China annexes the SCS



# **Countries at stake**

- Vietnam
- Tai-wan
- Phillipines
- Brunei
- Malayisia



#### What is in stake for US?

- US wants to uphold freedom of maritime navigation (SCS being vital naval trade route)
- As such, US officially backs UN Maritime Law
- US backs Vietnam against China expansionism
- Unspoken long term goal: Keeping its military dominance in Pacific
- Unspoken long term goal: halt the chinese rise to the position of new global super power



# **USA** presence in Pacific – Japan and Korea

- Japan is one of the key actors of the dispute, heavily reliant on shiping lanes and fish populations
- What has the US to do with the Japan?
- After the WWII, Japan was occupied by USA
- Japan was demilitarized
- USA made the vow to be responsible for Japan's safety
- USA stationed troops in Japan
- After the end of initial occupation, US and Japan begin to build new relations, and Japan became member of US sphere of influnece

- Korean War
- US brought sizeable force to theatre
- War never officialy ended (cease fire)
- As such, similar situation as with Japan

# The USA in Southeast Asia

- Since WWII supporting Japan (others distristful)
- "hub and spokes" system (bilateral treaties since 1951)
  - Japan, South Korea, Philipines
  - Military alliance, economic support
  - Containment of Communism
  - Impossible multilateral solution (differences)
- Vietnam war
  - 1955 **–** 1975
  - US withdrawal (1973)
- ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)
  - 1967
  - Regional intergovernmental organization
  - Better relationships between SEA states (economy, politics, culture, military)
  - USA aproaches the states as a region





### The USA in Southeast Asia

- Nixon doctrine 1969 (vietnamese syndrom)
  - Responsibility given to states
  - Economical, military support, but....
- After cold war
  - "benign neglect" aproach
    - Little attention, only when needed (security threats)
    - Wanted to have economical influence (not supporting East Asian Economic Group – EAEG)
    - 9/11
  - North Korea ballistic missile tests (93, 98)
    - Cooperation with Japan
    - 100 000 soldiers in the region



# The USA in Southeast Asia

- After 9/11
  - Japan being the main partner
  - Economical and security areas
  - Lack of interrest
    - Absent at regional summits
    - Deeper integration
    - Cooperation with China
  - No interest on region building
  - 2004 Tsunami
  - → rise of regionalism (ASEAN)
  - Since 2006 more interest X rising power of China



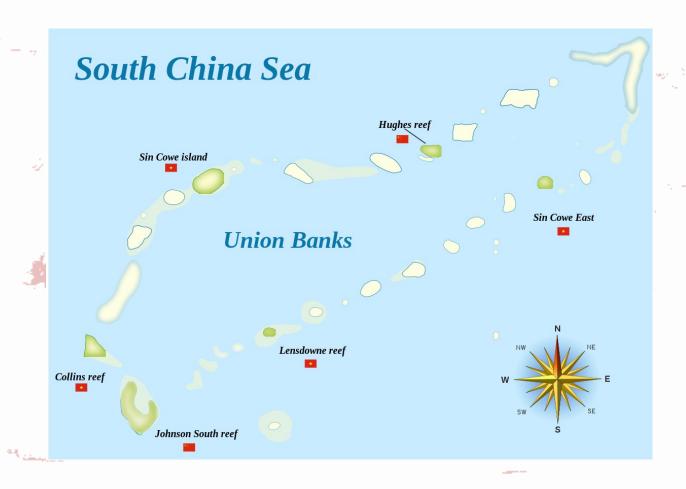
# South China Sea conflict

- Oil, natural gas
- Fishing (10 %)
- Trade Goods worth \$5.3 trillion
- Claims China, Brunei,
  Malaysia, the Philippines,
  Taiwan and Vietnam
- Interests the USA, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia



# The conflict

- Lots of skirmishes
- ASEAN states choose diplomatic solution
- Battle of Paracel islands (1974)
  - After withdrawal of the USA
  - China X South Vietnam
- 1988 battle (China X Vietnam)
- Since 1990's two sides of the conflict
  - China X Asean + USA (late 90's)
  - China slowly but surely gains influence



#### **USA X China**

- Hainan Island incident (2001)
  - collision between a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet
  - No escalation
  - "Letter of the two sorries"
- USNS Impeccable (2009)
  - ocean surveillance ship
  - International waters
  - China ordered it to leave
  - US sending a guided-missile destroyer to protect the ship



#### The US role in the conflict

- Attention to the region in late 90's oil (several explorations)
- Fear of China's growing power
- Main goals
  - status quo
  - Maritime freedom
  - Containment of China
  - 2010 Clinton "USA are neutral and support multilateral solution"
- Tools
  - Supporting ASEAN states (2014 the Philippines)
  - The law (UNCLOS)
- Patrolling the coast
- Cold war?



# **Implications**

- Even though the countries and UN objects, chinese takeover of SCS reached far
- Diplomatic solutions doesnt seem to work
- Most countires in the region dont have the might to stand against the China
- As such, any strong stance on the issue, and possibly armed one, is up to US



#### To act or not to act?

- Dangerous situation
- If US lets China fully take SCS, economical loses
- However, more importantly, big political defeat for US and possible breaking point
- Acting is however very dangerous
- US Navy has enormous military advantage though
- Still, there is propably not enough political will to do so.



# **Questions? Comments?**



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