

China's Maritime Trap

The July 12, 2016, arbitral tribunal ruling in Hague, which satisfied almost all of the Philippines demands in the South China Sea and invalidated China's nine-dash line and other maritime activities, dealt a heavy blow to China's maritime claims. This is the first ever international legal setback for China's efforts to protect its maritime rights and interests, and the implications for China's maritime aspirations could be great.

In recent years, China has paid increasing attention to the sea and to its maritime rights and interests. At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China officially put forward the vision of building a maritime power to improve China's capacity to explore marine resources and develop the marine economy, protect marine ecosystems, and safeguard its maritime rights and interests.¹ In line with this vision, China has been developing marine technology to explore oil and gas, among other resources, in the deep sea, as well as modernizing and enhancing its navy to protect its maritime interests.

China has also become much more vocal in asserting its maritime claims and interests. After nearly two decades of prioritizing "maintaining stability" above "protecting interests," China has since 2012 reversed course and focused on the latter. China not only sent fishing and law enforcement vessels within twelve nautical miles of the disputed

Since 2012, China has reversed course and focused on protecting interests over maintaining stability.

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