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28 July 2016

What does the South China Sea ruling mean and what's next?  
Response

This article is about the court ruling that China has no claim to the islands in the South China Sea and the potential repercussions created by this ruling. The court also decided that the the Spratly Islands are not an exclusive economic zone and that the previously Chinese-controlled Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal are within the Philippines' EEZ. In response to this, China is unhappy and the Philippines now has to move forward under this new ruling.

Before the ruling, the Philippines President was planning on engaging with Beijing in order to possibly work together in developing the islands, but now that they belong solely to the Philippines, pursuing that plan could create public backlash even though the Philippines will likely need support in the logistics and infrastructure with their development projects.

On the China side of the issue, this ruling will most likely cause intense internal discussions about how to proceed within the Chinese leadership, while publicly China is insistent about their rights to the Spratly Islands. The real cause for concern is the risk that internal debates may lead to regional instability. Rather than risk the regional stability, China should use this as an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the region and peaceful settlement of disputes.

The article also highlights three challenges the United States will face while redefining its policy in regard to the new ruling. The first is that the South China Sea issue should not be the main topic on the regional agenda. The second is to be conscious that China's sense of vulnerability is one of the main motivations for the claim to the islands, and any increased military presence in the region will not be readily accepted. The third is to strengthen relations with regional partners with similar interests and shared outlooks.

Prior to reading this article I had no knowledge of this issue and was under the impression that China was only made up of the mainland. I was also very intrigued by the map on the second page—especially the lines that designate the different EEZs. I cannot help but wonder about the shape of the EEZs because some of them are extremely tiny and appear to contain no land masses. I also wonder about the significance of the nine dashes in China's nine-dash line and why it extends so far south when the last of China's claimed islands end with the Spratly Islands.