

5. It prefers to resolve the disputes through bilateral negotiations with the ASEAN claimants but is prepared to discuss the issue with ASEAN; China will not allow interference by parties not directly concerned, such as the United States or regional organizations such as ARF.

6. China feels that the Philippines is drumming up the issue for its own reasons before the international community (possibly with the encouragement of outside parties); it considers Philippine behaviour less than reasonable and tries to counter this by emphasizing its own "restraint" and "responsible behaviour".

7. A major irritant for China is the apprehension of its nationals, especially fishermen, in the disputed area and their prolonged detention by Philippine authorities.

8. Other irritants include hostile statements by certain Philippine officials (Congress and the military have been singled out), excessive Philippine media coverage of the issue, low-flying reconnaissance trips by the Philippine Air Force over Mischief Reef, and efforts to draw other parties into the conflict.⁴⁰

PHILIPPINE PERCEPTIONS OF THE DISPUTE WITH CHINA

The following elements describe what appear to be the Philippine perceptions of the dispute at this point:

1. China is a close neighbour in a geographic, historical and cultural sense. The Philippines realizes it will have to learn to live with China, both on its own as well as through common cause with other Southeast Asian countries.

2. Regardless of whether the threat from China is real or not, there is a strong perception that such a threat exists. This is inevitable and perhaps nearly unchangeable, due to the mere fact of China's huge size and power and the reality of the Philippines' military deficiencies.

3. For the Philippines, China's move on Mischief Reef does not necessarily represent a danger of invasion of its main territory or of hegemonic ambition, but its irredentist claims together with growing demand for resources and rising nationalism do give cause for concern for its smaller neighbours. There is also a tendency by Manila to look at the situation in moralist terms - i.e. a big brother turning into a big bully and then picking on the most defenceless victim.

⁴⁰ Philippine efforts to focus international attention on Chinese incursions on Mischief reef after its discovery led to a statement of concern by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in March 1995. This was followed by similar statements by the European Union, the United States, Japan and Australia, reiterating the need for a peaceful settlement of disputes and endorsing the principles of the Manila Declaration.