

Does China Have a Monroe Doctrine? Evidence for Regional Exclusion

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Abstract

Chinese confrontational behavior in the East and South China Seas has led observers to assert that it has a “Monroe Doctrine.” These discussions, however, have been vague as to what a Chinese Monroe Doctrine might actually be. This article will examine evidence for the degree to which China’s current behavior actually constitutes a regional exclusion doctrine, rather than the more commonly used term “Monroe Doctrine.” China specifically denies the analogy and denies excluding other countries from the region. However, recent leadership statements and declarations of an air defense identification zone in the East China Sea (and possibly in the South China Sea), point to the incremental development of just such a doctrine. Additional Chinese discussions of the “security belts” and “island chains” as strategic zones, moreover, would seem to point in that direction. The apparent lack of a formal exclusionary doctrine remains curious, and alternative explanations for this exist.

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China’s territorial claim in the South China Sea, recently upended by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on 12 July 2016, is often cited as part of a broad Chinese effort to dominate East Asia.¹ This and other recent Chinese behavior toward its neighbors in Northeast and Southeast Asia have led some analysts to ask: Does China have a “Monroe Doctrine”? This question has been cropping up with increasing frequency in the popular and academic media while many of these analysts discuss it as if it were a fact.² The purpose of this article is to examine the evidence concerning this significant issue. Whether or not China is claiming exclusive rights to all or to parts of East Asia cuts to

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the core of US–China relations, the international relations of East Asia, and the future of the twenty-first century. Given China’s assertions of ownership to the South China Sea, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands administered by Japan, and a “Belt-and-Road Initiative” opening economic ties to South and Central Asia, the question of China’s official views on the region is very timely.

This article begins by defining exactly what a Monroe Doctrine or regional exclusion doctrine is, both in historical and comparative terms. Although primarily associated with early nineteenth-century US policy in the Western Hemisphere, in fact most regionally dominant powers have announced such doctrines. Next, the article examines recent Chinese policies to see if they match the doctrinal type, both in explicit announcements and in marginal behavior. Finally, the article explores potential reasons why China has not explicitly proclaimed such a doctrine and what signals may indicate changes for the future.

Regional Exclusion Doctrines Defined

Pres. James Monroe announced in 1823 that the United States viewed any new European colonization in the Western Hemisphere to be a “manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.”³ The statement, dubbed “the Monroe Doctrine” in 1850, has since been conflated with the term *regional exclusion doctrine*, meaning a generic term for the formally articulated policy of a state to exclude other powers from an area, which it regards as its exclusive area of ownership, or influence. However, this is not the original intent. Today, many regional powers have regional exclusion doctrines, and many of them specifically reference President Monroe’s address. It is important, however, to regard the issue with precision and not to conflate regional exclusion doctrine with other contemporary policies.

A regional exclusion doctrine is best summarized as “hands-off”: an explicit and unilateral foreign-policy announcement by the regional hegemon that powers external to the region are not welcome. Unlike spheres of influence, regional exclusion doctrines must be openly and clearly articulated; a “Keep Out” sign does no good if it is hidden. They are also unilateral. Regional exclusion doctrines usually involve a specific region or sometimes a functional grouping of states or colonies. These are most frequently the immediate neighbors of the regional hegemon and an area beyond. The limits of the regional exclusion doctrine’s zone

depend on a variety of factors, geography being the most important; some regions have clear terminal geographic boundaries that are both objectively and subjectively recognized. Other zones are more difficult to define precisely and “blend off” into other regions and other zones. The Eurasian continent is perhaps the best example of this.

The most pertinent aspect of a regional exclusion doctrine is the self-asserted rights adhering to the hegemon. The most prominent of these is the right to determine the foreign relations of member states within the zone. These span a wide degree of control by the regional hegemon, from “suggesting” that states within the region of exclusion consult with the hegemon to placing treaty controls on the regional states’ third-party foreign relations. Of the third parties, extra-regional great powers are the most concerning to the regional hegemons. Formal military alliances with extra-regional powers, purchase or acquisition of arms beyond a hegemon-defined “maximum,” and diplomatic recognition of governments hostile to the hegemon are all examples of foreign policies which regional exclusion doctrines seek to deny, mitigate, or veto. The introduction or reintroduction of external great powers into the affairs of a region that is dominated by a hegemon can often be the most provocative. As international relations scholar John Mearsheimer summarized in a 2015 *New York Times* editorial, “Great powers react harshly when distant rivals project military power into their neighborhood, much less attempt to make a country on their border an ally. This is why the United States has the Monroe Doctrine, and today no American leader would ever tolerate Canada or Mexico joining a military alliance headed by another great power.”⁴ Although the United States is one of the few countries to achieve complete regional hegemony according to Mearsheimer, other powers have sought to do so and have developed doctrines that seek to exclude others from their area.⁵ The Soviet Union aggressively sought to exclude US influence in Eastern Europe through the “Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty.” India under Nehru and Indira Gandhi sought to set South Asia off as a region of Indian dominance, specifically citing the Monroe Doctrine; this effort eventually was dubbed the “Indira Doctrine.” Nigeria has periodically invoked a “Doctrine of Continental Jurisdiction” over sub-Saharan Africa.

Another very closely related doctrine that is usually subsumed under a regional exclusion doctrine is one which justifies direct intervention in the domestic affairs of regional states. The two are technically distinct,

but the latter is so frequently found with the former that the two will be included in this analysis. The United States doctrine of Caribbean intervention was dubbed the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine after Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, and the Brezhnev Doctrine of 1968 formally articulated the Soviet Union’s “internationalist duty” to intervene in socialist states’ affairs when they deviated from socialism (read: Soviet-directed policy).⁶

Finally, a regional exclusion doctrine is distinct from the idea of spheres of influence. The latter tended to be much less formal than a regional exclusion doctrine and in the pre-twentieth-century world were secret divisions of a region or country between two great powers, with the quiet or tacit understanding that if an area were to be formally annexed, a particular power had the first rights to it.⁷ To the extent that a sphere of influence area is not explicit, exclusion of other great powers’ activity is seen as “devious” and does not bind third parties legally but does often lead to formal annexation. The most recent academic definition is a “definite region within which a single external power exerts a predominant influence, which limits the independence or freedom of action of states within it.”⁸ After World War I, the principle of self-determination of nations conflicted with the idea of great powers’ spheres of influence, although the Soviet Union in particular was (secretly) in favor of them, evidenced by the secret protocols to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939.⁹ Post-World War II international norms and the United Nations made formal spheres of influence even more difficult to explicitly announce, and although the term is often used, it is not legally defined.

A Monroe Doctrine per se is not a desire for territorial aggrandizement or conquest, just as “Manifest Destiny” was not the same idea as the Monroe Doctrine in early nineteenth-century United States. Conquering or annexing land to the regional power or hegemon’s formal control may be part of a regional exclusion doctrine, but in all of the doctrines examined above, most state members of the regional or functional system over which the regional hegemon is claiming exclusivity retain at least nominal sovereignty; it is domination, not annexation. Thus, this article is not discussing the broad range of twenty-first-century Chinese behavior in East Asia, only a very specific and important part of its foreign policy. It seeks to explore the ideational basis of Chinese behavior.¹⁰ The South China Sea is part of the story, but in fact, the question of a Chinese regional exclusion doctrine in East Asia is much

more expansive than that contested area. All of this adds up to the expectation that a regional hegemon such as China would likely follow the pattern of other such states and formally announce a regional exclusion doctrine. To date, it has not.

China's Doctrine Denial

Other regional hegemons develop and articulate regional exclusion doctrines; has China done so? The direct answer is no, though the evidence is mixed and some trends that may point in that direction. First, Chinese officials themselves specifically and emphatically deny that China has a Monroe Doctrine (*Menluo zhuyi* 门罗主义, literally "Monroe-ism"). State Councilor Dai Bingguo was the top-level leader with responsibility for foreign affairs under Pres. Hu Jintao. His speech in December 2010, "Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development," was considered by Chinese and outsiders as a major statement on China's outlook and is particularly worth examining precisely because it engages issues of neighboring relations and doctrines of exclusion directly.

Dai's statement is quite pacific, which is not terribly surprising: "China's strategic intention can be defined in two words: peaceful development, i.e., harmony and development at home and peace and cooperation abroad."¹¹ What is particularly important is his denial: "We do not seek hegemony and will never compete with other countries for leadership in our region, seek so-called 'joint hegemony' or follow so-called 'Monroe Doctrine.' . . . The bilateral and multilateral agreements we have signed with Asian countries do not have a single article that is exclusive."¹² Dai repeated this statement as a retired senior official as recently as 5 July 2016 in anticipation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's award: "It would be nothing but baseless speculation to assert that China wants to make the South China Sea an Asian Caribbean Sea and impose the Monroe Doctrine to exclude the US from Asia or that China is trying to compete with the US for dominance in the South China Sea, Asia and even the world."¹³ Chinese scholars have also delved into the Monroe Doctrine with extensive analyses as to why China's policies are not similar to the Monroe Doctrine.¹⁴ Official Chinese sources have stressed that the policies of China do not seek to exclude external actors from the region: "China consistently stressed that Asia is open and welcomes a positive and constructive role from non-regional members, a stance that is essentially different from the Monroe Doctrine. China

. . . has never pursued a sphere of influence.”¹⁵ This statement has been repeated by the Foreign Ministry as well. The most logical target of such a policy, the United States, has been specifically mentioned as a state that China does not seek to exclude. Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs at Renmin University, writing in the usually provocative *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报), also made this point clear: “Beijing has stated on many occasions it welcomes Washington to play a positive and constructive role in Asia and it is therefore unnecessary and impossible to exclude the world’s greatest power.”¹⁶ Jin Canrong and Duan Haowen of the School of International Studies at Renmin University, the former a frequent commentator on China’s East Asian relations, called for “Open Regionalism” as China’s policy: “We must adhere to the principle of open regionalism. As the Asia-Pacific has become the biggest engine of the world economy, external powers are all eager to participate in Asia-Pacific economic activities in order to obtain reasonable rights and interests. China, whether out of consideration for its own relationships with other major powers or Asia-Pacific economic growth, should adhere to the principle of open regional cooperation.”¹⁷

Senior researchers at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), an influential think-tank in Beijing, authored an article explicitly titled “The Pacific Ocean is Wide Enough for All” in 2014 and wrote that Chinese foreign policy initiatives in 2014 were “not . . . intended to squeeze Washington out of the region.”¹⁸ The point is reinforced by Han Caizhen and Shi Yinhong, writing in the same forum: “China’s rapid rise is misunderstood as a bid by China to expand its regional power and to exclude the U.S. This is in spite of the fact that China has repeatedly said it welcomes a constructive role of the U.S. in East Asia.”¹⁹ Thus, at least at the level of officially articulated policy, China has not engaged in the construction of a regional exclusion doctrine seen in other regional hegemon’s behavior. There is no explicit “Keep Out” sign. There have been hints, however.

Regional Exclusion Doctrine by Other Names

The treatment of American activities in East Asia is one of the key indicators that Chinese leaders may be seeking to exclude outside powers from the region. The US role in aggravating China’s diplomatic problems with its Southeast Asian neighbors has been a recurring theme of Chinese foreign policy statements at least since 2004. These state-

ments have at times approached the point of calling for the exclusion of American forces and influence in the region. Chen Xiangyang, the deputy director of the influential China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, wrote of the problem in 2004. He pointed out that US relations with the Philippines, India, and Japan create a hegemonic presence in the region to “clearly not allow Asian countries to manage Asian affairs.”²⁰ This has the effect of making China’s “Good Neighbor Policy” much more problematic. Specifically on the South China Sea issue, China regularly criticizes the United States for its “kibitzing” in the region, regularly calls for the United States to be “impartial” in the dispute, and very specifically notes that the United States is a nonparty to the dispute.²¹ The *Global Times* opined, “The fundamental reason for the sudden prominence of the South China Sea issue and the Diaoyu Islands dispute has been the US. Seeing the ‘pivot’ to Asia, the US has fomented surrounding countries into confronting China over territorial disputes, so as to disturb and check China’s rise.”²² Feng Zhongping of the CICIR wrote that, “It is generally believed at home and abroad that the U.S. has largely been responsible for worsening relations between China and some of its neighbors over the past two years. For example, some believe Japan has grown tough with China because it has Washington’s backing.”²³

Pivot, Rebalance

The evolution of this idea may be linked to the US “pivot” to Asia, but evidence shows it began earlier. America’s focus in the first decade of the twenty-first century was firmly on the Middle East and Afghanistan. The focus of American leadership was also on the domestic front from 2008 to 2009 because of the US presidential election and the financial crisis. Though some remain in Afghanistan, US combat forces were withdrawn from Iraq at the end of 2011, when then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote a provocative article, “America’s Pacific Century,” in which she advocated the United States pivoting its power to the Asia-Pacific region (the Chinese translation is usually *chongfan YaTai* 重返亚太).²⁴ Almost immediately the term “pivot” was substituted with “rebalance” (*zai pingheng* 再平衡), though *pivot* is still commonly used in Chinese and English.

As Mearsheimer claims, the introduction of a new great power into the regional hegemon’s space is likely to result in a conflictive relationship between the native power and the “intruder.” How does China’s

reaction compare? The initial, official reaction of the Chinese foreign ministry in 2011 was muted:

The US took high-profile steps to deepen its involvement in Asia-Pacific affairs. After 10 years of combating terrorism, the United States was seeking to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and at the same time increased input in the Asia-Pacific. The United States strengthened ties with its allies including Japan, the ROK and the Philippines, promoted relations with such regional emerging countries as India and Indonesia, expanded engagement in regional multilateral affairs, and pressed ahead with the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership. President Obama attended the East Asia Summit for the first time.²⁵

In 2012, China's foreign ministry briefly noted the term *rebalancing*. It also noted curtly that, "The United States played an important part in China's disputes with neighboring countries on territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests."²⁶ The following year it continued to note the "strategic rebalance" of the United States in the Asia-Pacific, emphasizing at length US military and strategic cooperation with allies in the region.²⁷

Was this a change? China's previous statements about American involvement in East Asia and Sino-American relations in general have evolved during the twenty-first century, gradually becoming cooler. However, it is also interesting to note that the official Chinese foreign policy assessment of the United States in East Asia never characterized America as "absent" from the region prior to the pivot policy. The evolution of Chinese statements on the subject of US policy and presence in Asia is worth exploring in some detail.

Constructive and Cooperative

In 2002, in the wake of 9/11, the Chinese foreign ministry noted that "The US increased its deployment in Eurasia galvanized by the need to fight terrorism. It encouraged NATO to expand further to the east, beefed up its forward troop buildup in Asia-Pacific, set up new footholds in Southeast Asia and solidified its military presence in Central Asia."²⁸ The overall tone of the Foreign Ministry's characterization was highly positive, remarking, "China-US relations witnessed significant improvement and growth. The two countries maintained close exchanges of high-level visits and strategic dialogue. President Jiang Zemin . . . reached an important common understanding with President Bush on developing a constructive and cooperative relationship between the two countries"

and noting increased understanding and trust, trade, cooperation on terrorism and regional issues, as well as military exchanges.²⁹ Specifically in Asia, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said, “The United States, proceeding from its practical needs of counter-terrorism, adjusted its national security strategy, paying more attention to its coordination and cooperation with China and Russia. There were growing common interests among major countries in maintaining a peaceful and stable Asia.” It also noted “Japan and the US reinforced their military alliance and cooperation.”³⁰ The phrase “constructive and cooperative relations” is noted in 2001.³¹

The 2003 assessment of US foreign policy in the wake of the invasion of Iraq was exceptionally blunt, calling US unilateralism “trigger-happy” and questioning the US role in the world in general.³² There was a strong sense of fear that the United States policy toward Iraq might be implemented in North Korea: “China and other neighbors of the Peninsula were deeply worried. They did not endorse sanctions and coercion, let alone war, as viable ways to cope with the situation, but wanted a peaceful solution to the crisis. Thanks to many rounds of diplomatic mediation volunteered by China . . . the DPRK and the US expressed readiness for talks.”³³ Yet China’s foreign ministry nevertheless said, “A stronger constructive and cooperative relationship between China and the US contributed to a healthy trend of development in Asia.”³⁴ “Constructive and cooperative relations between China and the US continued to grow” in 2004, and the “US continued to readjust and strengthen its military posture in the Asia-Pacific region.”³⁵ The “constructive and cooperative” Sino-American relationship tagline was also used in reference to 2005 but with the additional note that “the United States stepped up its presence in Southeast Asia, enhanced relations with its allies, such as the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore, resumed military and security cooperation with Indonesia and improved ties with Vietnam. It followed regional cooperation in Asia with keen interest and increased its involvement in it.”³⁶ Moreover, the same theme can be found in 2006: “The overall US foreign policy remained unchanged, but some adjustments were made. . . . It continued to focus on the greater Middle East region and increased input in the Asia-Pacific region.”³⁷

In its assessment of US foreign relations in 2007, the Chinese Foreign Ministry emphasized, “The United States became more pragmatic in conducting diplomacy and paid more attention to the role of other powers and multilateral mechanisms. It continued to pursue counter-

terrorism . . . increased engagement in the Middle East, adopted the 'New Strategy in Iraq,' pushed for tougher sanctions on Iran, and hosted the Middle East Peace Conference. . . . It attached greater importance to the Asia-Pacific region, and took an active part in the Asia-Pacific regional cooperation."³⁸ It further noted that "China and the United States maintained close consultations and increased dialogue and cooperation on issues in Asia" and that "the constructive and cooperative relations between China and the United States continued to grow. The two countries had increasing common interests in upholding regional peace and stability and maintained close consultation and coordination."³⁹

Strategic Belts

However, in 2009, the "constructive and cooperative" characterization changed, indicating that "major powers continued their deep involvement in regional affairs and expanded their influence."⁴⁰ By 2010, China noted that major powers including the United States, Europe, and Russia increased their attention to an input in Asia" and evoked Secretary Clinton's term of "forward-deployed diplomacy," which "increased its attention to and input in the Asia-Pacific region."⁴¹

Other evidence that China is beginning to move toward a regional exclusion doctrine can be found in a number of statements by leaders and scholars in China. One of the most important high-level conferences that engaged policy issues about China and its policy toward its neighbors was the October 2013 Peripheral Strategy Conference, one of the highest-level foreign policy leadership meetings in years, and its academic follow-on conference, which may have made some modifications to this approach. One of the more provocative articles from the academic conference was by Li Yonghui, dean at Beijing Foreign Studies University, who explicitly called for China to establish a "strategic peripheral belt" (*zhoubian zhanlüe yituo dai* 周边战略依托带) in the region.⁴² Li explicitly pointed to the unsuccessful efforts of prewar Germany and Japan to establish such belts in their regions and the more successful effort of the United States in its "Good Neighbor Policy." Li concludes that "China can set up its strategic belt with its twenty-odd neighbors, of course, but it also can construct a larger strategic belt with the countries of the Middle East, the Pacific Rim, and the Indian Ocean."⁴³ Still others, most notably the president of the CICIR, Ji Zhiye, have disagreed with this proposal, saying, "History shows how

some big powers turned their neighborhood [*zhoubian* 周边 (although “surrounding area” would be a more precise translation)] into colonies by imposing their systems, laws and even languages on them; others set up spheres of influence around themselves by ignoring the national interests of their neighboring countries; still others sought to establish their hegemony by using alliances or institutions. All of these efforts have met with failure.”⁴⁴ Ji continues and allows the United States a role in the region, saying, “Since China is blazing a trail in the field of neighboring diplomacy, it will naturally not reject the legitimate interests of the other major powers on her periphery. In this regard, China needs to learn how to co-exist peacefully with other major powers, notably the United States.”⁴⁵

Perhaps the most noted hint that China was moving toward a regional exclusion doctrine was Pres. Xi Jinping’s statement about “New Asian Diplomacy” to the Fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in May 2014 in Shanghai, when he stated in a prepared speech that, “In the final analysis, it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia. The people of Asia have the capability and wisdom to achieve peace and stability in the region through enhanced cooperation.”⁴⁶ Many analysts, both foreign and Chinese, jumped on the (officially translated) phrase “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia” as an exclusion of non-Asian powers, and strangely similar to the phrase “Asia for the Asiatics” first used by Konoe Atsumaro in 1898 in contemplating Japan’s own version of the Monroe Doctrine.⁴⁷ Chinese scholars and policy analysts quickly sought to deny such an interpretation. The official government China Internet Information Center engaged the issue directly:

The Western media, along with the media in some of China’s neighboring countries, have noticed that Chinese leaders tend to use the phrase ‘having Asian countries manage Asian affairs’ more frequently. They interpreted it as ‘China’s Monroe Doctrine,’ because it shows China’s urge for a greater role in Asian affairs, much in the same way the Monroe Doctrine provided the legitimacy for the U.S. management of the affairs in the Western Hemisphere. . . . At the same time, some of China’s neighbors have shared the concern that they will be victimized in the contention between China and the United States in seeking regional dominance, in the same way the ongoing Ukrainian crisis worried Ukraine’s neighbors.

But after all, the Monroe Doctrine, a term filled with hegemony, cannot truthfully summarize China's activities in its peripheral regions, nor could the reckless remarks of some Chinese officials during the preparation for the CICA.⁴⁸

It is well worth noting that the next paragraph in Xi's speech denies any effort at exclusion: "Asia is open to the world. While enhancing their own cooperation with each other, countries in Asia must firmly commit themselves to cooperation with countries in other parts of the world, other regions and international organizations. We welcome all parties to play a positive and constructive role in promoting Asia's security and cooperation and work together to achieve win-win outcomes for all."⁴⁹

Xu Qingchao of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, while noting the rise of China and the importance of Xi's "New Asian Diplomacy," also specifically denied it to be a "Chinese Monroe Doctrine."⁵⁰ Interestingly, several Chinese commentators also pointed out that "Asian states even including Japan have misgivings about whether the US can provide permanent security for them, Xi's remarks indicate that it is never reliable to bind your own security to another's wagon."⁵¹ This questioning of the US security commitment to Asia has been posed not as an actor to exclude, but rather as a public good which the United States may fail to provide.⁵² Other Chinese authors equivocated on the issue of China's potential domination of its neighbors similar to other historical great powers. Writing in *China Daily*, Yan Xuetong said,

Historically, all global powers rose as regional powers before becoming global powers. In the early stages of its rise, the US implemented the Monroe Doctrine and focused on Latin America; after World War II, the Soviet Union, which was growing in strength, took Europe as the focus. China will be no exception, so it too needs a successful neighborhood policy first. That move can help win friends among its neighbors, because after World War II it is already an established rule that sovereignty and territory should not be violated; both the US and the Soviet Union influenced neighbors' politics but without incorporating territory as they had done in the past.⁵³

Core Interests

Another central foreign policy statement that some external analysts have seen as an element of an exclusion doctrine is expansion of China's "Core Interests." The term (*hexin liyi* 核心利益) has been used in discussing issues which China sees as nonnegotiable, such as the status of Taiwan and Tibet as provinces of China beginning in 2003.⁵⁴ However,

beginning in 2010 the term was used to describe other areas under a new national security law.⁵⁵ Although Japanese media claimed that this had applied to the Senkaku/Diaoyu disputed islets, and other media claimed it was being applied to the South China Sea, Chinese statements are in fact ambiguous about whether these two areas are in fact claimed as “core interests.”⁵⁶

In addition to these statements, some analysts have specifically cited some Chinese behavior as showing at least some evidence of exclusion: Chinese activity in the South China Sea claimed by the “Nine-Dashed Line,” a self-declared “Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)” in the East China Sea near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2013, and the general discussion of the “First Island Chain” and “Second Island Chain” as defense features.

Dashed Lines

The “Nine-Dashed Line” (revised in 2013 to a “Ten-Dashed Line” on official Chinese maps) represents a claim that predates the People’s Republic of China. What is ambiguous is whether the dashes on Chinese maps are a simple map-making convention—grouping the many islands, islets, reefs, shoals, and rocks of the South China Sea together for purposes of clarity but not claim—or a full maritime sovereignty claim to the entire South China Sea: water, islands, rocks, and reefs.⁵⁷ Although a territorial claim, the Chinese statements concerning the South China Sea are not exactly a regional exclusion doctrine as it has been defined here. First, the area is unpopulated and not exactly a region; all other regional exclusion doctrines have spanned broader identifiable regions, encompassing multiple sovereign countries. Second, the claim is not particularly new, though the construction of artificial islands on top of reefs is new, as is the use of coast guard and naval resources to patrol and enforce Chinese claims. Third, although Chinese documents and announcements regularly reiterate their territorial claims to the South China Sea, there has been no effort to categorically deny entrance or transit to other countries’ ships or aircraft in the area, and given its importance to international shipping, such a move would be impossible to enforce. The Chinese foreign ministry stated, “The Chinese side respects and safeguards the freedom of navigation and over-flight in the South China Sea to which all countries are entitled under international law.”⁵⁸

In one respect, however, Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea do resemble a regional exclusion doctrine. The Chinese claim to determine the method of resolution—by strictly bilateral negotiations—on the basis of China’s “historical claims,” not multilateral negotiations (where China would be only one of five or six claimants at a very publicly observable table) and not by international legal arbitration, as demonstrated by its rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s award. China is seeking to set up the rules of the game in Southeast Asia, just as James Monroe and John Quincy Adams (the actual author of the Monroe Doctrine) unilaterally asserted the rules of the Western Hemisphere.

Chinese statements specifically on the US presence in the South China Sea, moreover, have been contradictory. On the one hand, when the United States announced that Japan might join it in aerial patrols of the region, a Chinese spokesman said in 2015 that the United States and Japan were “not involved in the South China Sea issue” and should not do anything to “complicate the situation,” which would imply staying out.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Chinese naval units have protested the US “Freedom of Navigation Exercise” within 12 nm of Chinese-occupied reefs.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Chinese statements have alluded to future US use of weather stations and search-and-rescue facilities in the South China Sea reefs being reclaimed by China.⁶¹ Thus, there seems to be a fine difference between a sign that says “Keep Out” and one that says “I Own This.”

Air Defense Identification Zones

The announcement of an East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in November 2013 was seen by some analysts as another assertion of Chinese primacy in the region and at the least the advancement of a territorial claim against Japan.⁶² The rhetoric associated with the announcement of the zone was clearly anti-Japanese but did not seem aimed at the United States.⁶³ Somewhat akin to the position on the South China Sea, China’s announcements sought to differentiate civil and non-civil intrusions into “its” sovereign territory: “China’s establishment of the zone is aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty and security of territory and territorial airspace. . . . The Chinese government . . . explicitly [points] out that normal flight activities by foreign international airlines within the East China Sea ADIZ will not be affected at all.”⁶⁴ But at least one Chinese scholar was explicit in linking the zone to a broader idea: “It is

an important measure towards improving geopolitical security structures in the East China Sea and building the ‘strategic buffer zone’ [*zhanlüe huanchong qu* 战略缓冲区].”⁶⁵ Other Chinese authors pointed out that the United States has its own ADIZ, and the rules involving them are substantially similar.⁶⁶ US policy makers did not see it that way, and the strong US reaction to the announcement of the zone—sending two B-52 bombers flying through it unannounced—and the negative reaction by other countries such as South Korea—whose claim to a sea structure called *Jeodo* is overlapped by the Chinese ADIZ—resulted in China stepping back from enforcing its zone.⁶⁷

Island Chains

Finally, Chinese popular and scholarly press have had vague discussions about the “First Island Chain” and “Second Island Chain” that might be interpreted as an effort to set a zone of exclusion. The term “island chain” was first used by John Foster Dulles in 1951 (prior to his stint as secretary of state), and subsequent mentions reference US defense agreements with states occupying a chain of islands from Hokkaido to Okinawa, Taiwan, Luzon, and the Philippine archipelago. The term did not appear again until the 1990s and by the 2000s was increasingly referenced both by US and Chinese strategic analysts.⁶⁸ Chinese Admiral Liu Huaqing, sometimes dubbed the “Father of the Chinese Navy,” set a goal of being able to defend China’s maritime security interests out to the First Island Chain in 2000, to the Second Island Chain (a vague line including the Kuriles, Hokkaido, and Honshu and then south through the Bonin Islands, Guam to the western tip of New Guinea, and possibly including the Straits of Malacca) by 2020.⁶⁹ Some western analysts have implied that these discussions amount to an area that China seeks to control, such as a US military analyst’s 2001 comment about Chinese naval acquisitions: “It really does have the potential to force the United States back away from that first island chain that they want to declare as their own territorial seas.”⁷⁰ Other US authors claim that China’s discussions of island chains are territorial: “When it comes to the sea, [China] still thinks territorially, like an insecure land power, trying to expand in concentric circles in a manner suggested by [geostrategist Nicholas J.] Spykman. The very terms it uses, ‘First Island Chain’ and ‘Second Island Chain,’ are territorial terms, which, in many cases, are seen as archipelagic extensions of the Chinese landmass.” That

author also invokes US policy toward the Caribbean at the beginning of the last century: “Much like when the Panama Canal was being dug, and the United States sought domination of the Caribbean to be the preeminent power in the Western Hemisphere, China seeks domination of the South China Sea to be the dominant power in much of the Eastern Hemisphere. . . . Once it becomes clear, a few years or a decade hence, that the United States cannot credibly defend Taiwan, China will be able to redirect its naval energies beyond the first island chain in the Pacific . . . to the second island chain.”⁷¹ And Simon Winchester, a popular author writing in an opinion column in the *New York Times*, also made the point concerning the island chains, saying, “Central to the new [Chinese] strategy is the construction of three imagined bastions, chains of disconnected Pacific islands that would, in Beijing’s view, comprehensively protect and project its influence.”⁷²

Chinese discussions, on the other hand, have tended to see the island chains as defensive lines of the United States hemming China in, a “blockade” which the United States and Japan have imposed on China. The *Global Times* characterizes it as a matter of breaking out: “In front of a growing strategic siege by the US and Japan, China will have to intensify efforts in breaking through the first island chain blockade, so as to guarantee its freedom to navigate in the West Pacific including the Sea of Japan.”⁷³ Thus far, there have been no clear, official claims by China that the first or second island chains constitute any sort of sphere of influence or an area subject to the regional exclusion doctrine.

All of this makes it difficult to say that China has a regional exclusion doctrine, but it may be moving toward one. Analysts and policymakers could expect, based upon the behavior of similar regional hegemonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that just such a doctrine would have already been explicitly declared. Why not?

Why No Explicit Doctrine?

Explaining a lack of behavior is, of course, much more difficult than explaining observable behavior, so what follows here is somewhat speculative. The first possible reason why China does not have a Monroe Doctrine is something akin to path dependency: it has explicitly decried any such regional exclusion doctrine in the past and has stated in official terms that it would never adopt such a doctrine. To adopt such a doctrine now or in the near future requires an explicit statement and would

naturally beg the question of why the previous policy had changed. It has occurred in the past, of course, that states have openly repudiated previous policies. Government or regime change is one such instance, but it seems unlikely in the foreseeable future for China.

A second possible reason for the lack of a Chinese Monroe Doctrine is a historical Chinese aversion to regional exclusion doctrines. The first reference to countries other than the United States having their own Monroe Doctrine was the relationship of Imperial Japan to East Asia in the late 1890s and the English during World War I.⁷⁴ By the 1930s, Japan's "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" (*Daitōakyōeiken* 大東亜共栄圏 or the "East Asian New Order" (*Tō-A shin chitsujo* 東亜新秩序) was not only a regional exclusion doctrine based upon the slogan of "Asia for the Asians," it was also a thinly veiled justification for rapacious Japanese imperialism. This history is well known in China, and its scholars have written on the subject of "Japan's Monroe Doctrine."⁷⁵ Qing dynasty China also had to endure European spheres of influence in its territory during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as formal colonies and leaseholdings. Thus, China's recent historical experiences with regional exclusion are not positive.

A third potential reason for China eschewing a formal regional exclusion doctrine would be the precedent it would set for its relations with South Asia and Central Asia. In both regions, China's economic reach is already intruding into areas which the Indians and the Russians explicitly believe they have primacy and have said so on several occasions. Pres. Xi Jinping's 2013 initiative, the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Maritime Silk Road" ("One Belt, One Road," *Yi Dai, Yi Lu* 帶一路) concept expands infrastructure, transportation, and trade links between China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and all the way to Europe. For China to seek to exclude other powers from East Asia while pushing ahead into Russian and Indian regions would doubtlessly provoke charges of hypocrisy and resistance. China is seeking to expand its influence globally, not to limit it.

Fourth, the original Monroe Doctrine is now officially defunct. In a move that attracted more attention in Latin America and China than the United States, the US Secretary of State John Kerry, in a major speech at the Organization of American States, officially renounced the Monroe Doctrine in November 2013: "The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over. . . . Many years ago, the United States dictated a policy that defined the

hemisphere for many years after. We've moved past that era."⁷⁶ Officially, of course, this means nothing to China. In reality, it deprives China of using the same excuse for having a regional exclusion doctrine that so many other regional hegemonies have invoked: the United States has one, too. Chinese scholars wrote several articles on the issue, some seeing it primarily as a response to declining US power and an effort to improve Latin American relations. Other scholars looked at it from a broad view of historical development. But it seems likely that Chinese policy makers would have been made aware of the announcement.⁷⁷

The final possibility is, of course, that China's leaders do not think the time is right for such an announcement but that it will be in the future. Paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum, *taoguang yanghui*, still has a powerful influence on Chinese strategic thinking. (韬光养晦. Translations vary but often include elements of "lay low," "hide your capabilities, develop some strength," or more fully, "keep a low profile and bide your time, while also getting something accomplished.") Trying to exclude foreign powers from Southeast and Northeast Asia means trying to exclude the United States. And few Chinese authors, scholars, or even bloggers argue that China currently has that capability, and no Chinese leaders or official sources openly advocate that path. At least, not yet.

Conclusions: What to Watch For

Three conclusions and a number of recommendations follow from the above analysis. First, China has not yet developed a regional exclusion doctrine, and journalists, scholars, and policy makers should be very careful in making such an assertion. Second, China's behavior vis-à-vis its neighbors, though often vexing and seemingly aggressive, is actually more moderate than other regional hegemonies' behavior; China has not openly intervened in its neighbors' domestic affairs, its use of military force has been limited, and it has not openly declared a regional exclusion doctrine. Compared to the Russian Federation now, or the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, China appears much more benign. It still might develop a regional exclusion doctrine, and one can find evidence for a "creeping doctrine." Nevertheless, a regional exclusion doctrine needs to be explicit, and once such an announcement is made, the potential effect would be substantial and dangerous. There is little question but that the United States would object to such a move,

possibly forcefully and in conjunction with its friends and allies. A number of additional indicators and cautions should be noted.

Closely Watch the Charge of US “Meddling”

The most important indicator of a Chinese policy shift toward a regional exclusion doctrine doubtlessly focuses on its assessment of America’s role in East Asia in general, Southeast Asia in particular, and vis-à-vis those neighbors with whom China has disputes.⁷⁸ China’s scholars, editorial writers, and, increasingly, official spokespersons have commented in ways that imply that the United States is meddling in the affairs of the region. When such comments begin to use a possessive pronoun “our region” and are not accompanied by the usual disclaimer that China does not seek to exclude other great powers, then Beijing is starting toward its own regional exclusion doctrine.

Focus on China’s Views of India and South Asia

China’s original rival in East Asia was Japan, but Beijing’s power has clearly begun to eclipse that of Tokyo. And the power of the United States, as seen by Chinese scholars, appears to be gradually declining and drawn off to other regions such as the Middle East. But there is another rising power in Southeast Asia: India. In the long term, the relationship of China and India in South and Southeast Asia represents another area in which both powers come into contact and potentially conflict. Indian political leaders see the subcontinent at a minimum to be “their” area and seek to exclude other powers.⁷⁹ At the same time, India’s navy has already begun to make port visits in Southeast Asia, and the diplomatic competition between China and India in states such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Nepal could be a manifestation of Chinese willingness to exclude great powers of the future from “its” region.

Monitor Chinese Treatment of Overseas Citizens and Co-Ethnics

Regional hegemony generally dislike other great powers in their neighborhoods; they also usually react quite forcefully when their civilian citizens or co-ethnics suffer harm in other countries, which are often in neighboring states. Such interventions, though ostensibly for civilian protection, have often been used as justification for broader action against smaller states, such as the US interventions in the Caribbean and Central America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or the

Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, China's reaction to the unequal and often harsh treatment of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asian countries was vehement, but it lacked the means to back up its comments. This has changed. At the same time, the condition of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia in this century has generally improved to the point that China has few causes for complaint, since the "overseas Chinese" have gained local citizenship and become prominent and prosperous in their adopted countries. More recently, contract workers and tourists have added to the mix, though China's reaction to the anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam was quite subdued. Future reactions in situations in which China has a motive to "teach them a lesson" may test that restraint.

Watch the Rhetoric

Language matters, and it can be a key indication of disposition and intentions. Terms such as "backyard," "our region," "our neighborhood," and the like indicate a subtle shift in both psychology and policy toward possessiveness. Pan-Asian rhetoric has been largely absent from Chinese foreign policy statements, but most regional exclusion doctrines assert a distinctiveness to the region which the hegemon seeks to lead—hence the attention given to the Xi Jinping's speech at the 2014 CICA summit ("Asian countries managing Asian affairs"). The statement in *China's Foreign Affairs* in 2015 also seems to be leaning in that direction: "[Asian countries'] sense of belonging and identity with Asia continued to grow. The Asia security concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security increasingly gained support of the people. Countries in Asia followed the 'Asian Way' featuring mutual respect, consensus and taking care of all parties' comfort levels."⁸⁰ However, terms that imply familial relations, especially "elder brother" terms, are often seen in other regional hegemon's efforts to determine the affairs of the "little brothers" in their region and are a statement of primacy. The language of neighbors can point in the opposite direction of respect and equality. The Chinese "Good Neighbor Policy" (*Mulin Youhao Guanxi* 睦邻友好关系) may invoke the same reaction, while the trends of rhetoric may serve as a useful indicator whether China really is moving toward a regional exclusion doctrine.

In July 2010, then-Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, when meeting Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministers, found

China under significant criticism from Secretary Clinton and others at the meeting. Yang reportedly blurted out, “China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact,” a blunt statement that shocked many in the room, fearing that it revealed China’s sense of entitlement over the region broadly. The subsequent statement on China’s Foreign Ministry web site was much more measured and indicated that China sought to solve the South China Sea dispute using bilateral diplomacy. It also asserted that the position represented the interests of “fellow Asians.”⁸¹ If China believes that it can determine what is in its neighbors’ interests by unilateral fiat, then it is well on its way to a regional exclusion doctrine. ❧

Notes

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73. Li Kaisheng, "Tokyo's Meddling in South China Sea Puts Bilateral Ties, Regional Peace at Risk," *Global Times* (English), 2 December 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/956216.shtml>.

74. Gilbert Reid, "An Imitation Monroe Doctrine," *Journal of Race Development* 6, no. 1 (July 1915): 12–22, doi:10.2307/29738098.

75. Chen Xiuwu, "Ribei de 'Yazhou Menluo zhuyi'" ["Japan's 'Asia Monroe Doctrine'"], *Waiguo wenti yanjiu* 214, no. 4 (2014): 3–8.

76. John Kerry, "Remarks on U.S. Policy in the Western Hemisphere," US Department of State, 18 November 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/11/217680.htm>.

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78. It should be noted here that although China does use the term "neighbor" (*linguo* 邻国) in reference to adjacent, proximate, and regional states, including states such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan, with which China has territorial disputes, it does not consider Taiwan to be a neighbor since it is not considered an independent state. The Chinese social analogy to Taiwan is that of family.

79. This is a policy that Chinese scholars are well aware of. See Li Zhonglin, "Indu de Menluo zhuyi pingxi" ["An Analysis of India's Monroe Doctrine"], *YaFei Zongheng*, no. 4 (2013): 15–21.

80. *China's Foreign Affairs 2015*, 3.

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