

India Involved in China-Vietnam Dispute in the South China Sea?

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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Region: [South Asia](#), [South-East Asia](#)

Theme: [Politics](#)

The Hindu, one of India's leading newspapers, reported that an unnamed Vietnamese diplomatic source briefed New Delhi about their country's latest bilateral dispute with China in the South China Sea. The outlet has a history of publishing unconfirmed statements but is generally regarded as credible insofar as they're not known to invent news out of thin air. Standard journalistic ethics demand that they verify the identity of their source prior to publishing their words in order to ensure that they're not being manipulated by a random person, though they of course have no way of knowing for sure whether the said report they release is accurate or not.

Based on that understanding, it can be assumed that there's probably some credibility behind The Hindu's latest article titled "[Vietnam briefs India on standoff with China in South China Sea](#)", which asserted that the unnamed Vietnamese diplomatic source said that

"We have briefed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) about the incident. We are waiting for an official statement. We have been asked to seek countries which have interest in the region and seek their support. It is the moment for Quad to play its part."

INTERNATIONAL

Vietnam briefs India on standoff with China in South China Sea



Dinakar Peri

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If that's really the attitude of Vietnamese officials, then it would ultimately be counterproductive for India if it got involved.

It's one thing for countries to casually brief one another about various issues just for the

sake of it, and another to do so with the intent of receiving their political (and possibly even military) support. Vietnam's dispute with China in the South China Sea is a strictly bilateral affair, though one that the US has been trying to multilateralize for quite a while. This was most recently proven by its [aggressive statements](#) about the latest developments there that appear to have been guided by the Pentagon's "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report" that some observers are concerned is all about "[containing](#)" China.

The latest trend in International Relations has seen many countries trying to "balance" against others in a zero-sum way, which is what Vietnam might be trying to do in this case if it really did seek India and the rest of the Quad's support. India proudly practices its own version of this strategy that its officials call "multi-alignment", so it's entirely conceivable that Hanoi and New Delhi might believe that they have common ground with one another vis-a-vis "balancing" Beijing. India should realize, however, that any statements of support for Vietnam — let alone participating in provocative "Freedom Of Navigation Patrols" — might harm its relations with China.

Bilateral ties between the world's two most populous countries have been rapidly improving over the past year, but India would be jeopardizing their promising future and fulfilling the US' divide-and-rule strategy for Asia if it started criticizing China's activities in the South China Sea at Vietnam and their shared American partner's behest. That would detract from the spirit of friendship that was forged between their two leaders after last spring's Wuhan Summit, which might in turn affect the outcome of President Xi's upcoming visit to India this October if he has to take valuable time out of his schedule to discuss this instead of focusing on win-win issues.

Furthermore, many experts believe that India is also trying to "balance" the US through its reinvigorated partnerships with fellow BRICS members China and Russia, especially after Trump's controversial comment at the end of July during his press conference with Pakistani Prime Minister Khan that Indian Prime Minister Modi allegedly asked him to mediate in Kashmir, but it obviously wouldn't be able to maintain this delicate act if it took Hanoi's side over Beijing's. It's therefore in India's best interests to remain neutral in this dispute otherwise its policy of "multi-alignment" might start transforming into one of "pro-American alignment".

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