

Will Russia's "Energy Diplomacy" Help Vietnam and China Make a Deal?

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Featured image: A Rosneft Vietnam employee looks on at the Lan Tay gas platform in the South China Sea off the coast of Vung Tau, Vietnam April 29, 2018 (Source: author)

Rosneft is drilling for oil off the South China Sea coast of Vietnam in an area claimed by China.

The Russian energy giant is [involved](#) in the Lan Do oilfield that narrowly sits within the southwestern border of China's nine-dash-line but is apparently regarded by the company as being under Vietnam's de-facto sovereignty. China officially called on all countries to respect its claims without specifically mentioning Rosneft but in obvious reference to it, a sign that it feels uncomfortable with this latest development even though it might eventually turn out to be a step in the right direction.

To explain, Vietnam is under [heavy pressure](#) from the so-called "Quad" of the US, Japan, Australia, and India to de-facto join what is essentially a "[Chinese Containment Coalition](#)", though this disruptive influence is [counterbalanced](#) through Russia's Eurasian Union free trade agreement and military deals with its [historic partner](#) that have hitherto succeeded in allowing Hanoi to strike a balance between the unipolar and multipolar worlds in the [New Cold War](#).

Rosneft's controversial move indirectly introduced Russia to the simmering South China Sea dispute, but this might be a good thing because Moscow is known to favor international law and negotiations to any dispute instead of push its partners towards waging war in order to settle problems like the US-led Quad is prone to do. China will probably still not like this because it prefers to handle all sensitive issues bilaterally as a matter of long-standing policy but might come to gradually see something positive in it.

Russia's newfound role could balance out the "Quad's" militaristic urgings by getting Vietnam to consider entering into negotiations with China about this, with both parties being diplomatically brought together because of Moscow's efforts. One prospective solution that might emerge from this could be for their shared Russian partner to extract energy from disputed regions and share the profits & resources with each of them per a formula that they agree to in advance as part of a settlement for officially redefining their maritime border.

Russia already agreed to jointly develop the energy resources located within the so-called "grey zone" of former dispute with NATO-member Norway in the Barents Sea [following a 2010 accord](#), so it's conceivable that Rosneft could play the third party extraction role in

facilitating this same sort of solution between Vietnam and China if they ever reach a similar agreement on the South China Sea. That's why even though it might seem unlikely at this point in time, China could ultimately end up thanking Russia for indirectly getting involved in this dispute.

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