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## The Strategic Impact of China's Artificial Islands in the South China Sea and their Influence on U.S. and China Relations

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Running Head: THE STRATEGIC IMPACT OF CHINA'S ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS

THE STRATEGIC IMPACT OF CHINA'S ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA  
SEA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON U.S AND CHINA RELATIONS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

STEVEN ROY

2020

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Dr. Joyce T. Gibson took over as my instructor for Capstone II and gave me additional guidance and support on finalizing my thesis and was additionally invaluable. There were times where I didn't have the confidence to continue and she continued to inspire me to finish what I started.

This project attempts to increase public awareness of published data and reporting surrounding activities in relations to the Chinese artificial islands in the South China Sea and the impact it has on U.S and China relations. The United States is totally focused on internal politics and the U.S news media isn't focused on the potential impact these artificial islands in the South China Sea could potentially lead the U.S to conflict and war.

**Abstract**

This is an integrative literature review of various perspectives of different authors of previous scholarly articles discussing the impact of China's artificial Islands in the South China Sea and how it affects U.S. China relations in the region. This research covers a range of parameters surrounding how the artificial islands were made and how they affect the overall security of naval operations and will also discuss international waterway rights within the South China Sea, one of the World's biggest trading routes. A review of current events in the region is discussed highlighting the potential powder keg that could explode and how it can provide a starting point to summarize and identify the seriousness of the current fluid situation that is changing daily and how it potentially impacts the region. By conducting this integrative literature review the author aims to present a wholesome picture to educate the public about events that are shaping the region in the South China Sea. The results of this study will add clarity and awareness to the events in the region and how they impact the United States and China relations. The hope is that this research creates a dialogue that addresses the strategic impact these artificial islands are having on the United States and China relations in the region of the South China Sea.

*Keywords:* Strategic impact, Offensive threat, Defensive threat, Global security, Militarization, International waters, Current events

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The South China Sea has drawn intense attention worldwide in recent years, due to the strategic developments in that area initiated by the People's Republic of China. The Japan Times (2018), reported that "In December 2013, the Chinese government pressed the massive Tianjing dredger into service at Johnson South Reef in the Spratly archipelago, far from the Chinese mainland" (Chellaney, Dec. 2018, para. 2). To construct its artificial islands, China had to have a base to build on. China chose to build on existing, islands, rocks, and even coral reefs. In order to build an island that can support airstrips and other military installations requires a lot of material. China chose to use dredgers, and ships designed to pick up and move materials from the seafloor. "These dredgers use large tubes with cutting attachments at the end to grind up material on the seafloor and suck it up. From there, the material is carried through pipes or hoses and dumped on top of reefs, rocks, and other existing formations" (Nicol, 2017, para. 6). Chellaney, (2018), states "since then, China has built six more artificial islands in the South China Sea and steadily expanded its military assets in this highly strategic area, through which one-third of global maritime trade passes" (Chellaney 2018, para.4).

Below are several before and after pictures of the artificial islands that were developed by China in the South China Sea.



Figure #1, Dredgers reinforce a site being constructed on the westernmost part of Mischief Reef, located 216 km (135 miles) west of the Philippine island of Palawan.



CSIS Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative/DigitalGlobe

Figure #2 After Dredgers reinforce Mischief Reef, located 216 km (135 miles) west of the Philippine island of Palawan



CSIS Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative / DigitalGlobe

Once the islands are large and stable enough, China then uses cement in order to strengthen the base and build structures on that. Look at the changes below on the Fiery Cross Reef in 2006.

Figure #3: Fiery Cross Reef before China converted it into an artificial island



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Figure #4: Fiery Cross Reef, after China converted it into an island.



CSIS Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative / DigitalGlobe

Figure #5: Woody Island another island China has converted.



CSIS Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative / DigitalGlobe

This integrated literature review explores the complexity surrounding China's building of the artificial islands in the South China Sea. Forbes (2019) states that China is raising tensions in the region with neighboring Nations such as the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. China is also interfering with allied navies such as the United States, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia. (Mourdoukoutas, 2019, paras. 13-14). The security situation is changing daily which is increasing tensions in the region. "The developments in the South China Sea carry far-reaching strategic implications for the Indo-pacific and for the international maritime order" (Chellaney, Apr. 2018, para 2). This integrative literature review analyses international waterways right of way claims and China's claim of sovereignty of these artificial islands. This review also analyzes current events and how they are shaping and increasing tensions in the South China Sea.

Interest in the topic is two-fold. The people of the World especially in the United States are unaware of the implications of these artificial islands and the potential impact it could have on all spectrums of geopolitical topics that we are dealing with today. For the last four years the American news media has been totally focused on politics that are negatively affecting the Presidents status and not recognizing the tensions surrounding the artificial islands in the South China Sea and the potential for conflict. This research aims to cover the gap in public awareness by attempting to build a wholesome and comprehensive picture of the situation in the South China Sea, based on existing scholarly studies on the topic.

The second reasoning is self-guided. It's important to be aware of the current events that are occurring as it makes the daily news. This topic was chosen to increase the authors understanding of the crisis and help educate others as well, of the impact these artificial islands are having in the region of the strait of Hormuz, one of the World's biggest trading routes in the South China Sea.

### **Significance of the study**

This project discusses Chinese territorial claims of artificial islands in the South China Sea (SCS) that have been built on existing reefs and atolls complete with military infrastructure. At this point there is an opportunity to enhance public reporting and awareness by think tanks such as the Center for Strategic International Studies' Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI). While most of the military technology used by CSI/ AMTI is classified and out of reach under the supervision of the U.S Government and foreign military, this study takes a novel approach that combines a culmination of research that discussed China's claims and the maritime laws to analyze the over looked problem that experts project to be the core of future U.S confrontation.

**Research Objective**

This thesis is focused on the strategic impact of the artificial islands on the United States and China relation in the region of the South China Sea. It discusses how China built the artificial islands in the South China Sea and examines the existing and historical laws of international waterways and the UN Convention on the law of the sea (UNCLOS). Coastal states are also entitled to other maritime zones including contiguous zones and exclusive economic zones (EEZ). This research examines why China thinks that these artificial islands they built are included in China's sovereignty and they are stating that they expect these islands to also have its own exclusive economic zone. This research also discusses why China militarized these islands when they originally said that they wouldn't. Current events in the region are shaping forcing China and the United States to react by conducting military training exercises in the region of the South China Sea.

## Chapter Two: Research Method

This five-stage integrative literature review was chosen due to the potential outcomes associated with the process, including the opportunity to summarize existing knowledge, identify gaps in research, and correlate current events in the region. Utilizing this process, a more comprehensive understanding of events can be created. The integrative literature review methodology chosen to synthesize literature from a wide range of sources allows an integrative review for the inclusion of diverse methodologies, and it takes into consideration various perspectives on the topic of interest. Russell, (2005) states:

This integrative literature review has many benefits to the scholarly reviewer, including evaluating the strength of the scientific evidence, identifying gaps in current research, identifying the need for future research, bridging between related areas of work, identifying central issues in an area, generating a research question, identifying a theoretical or conceptual framework, and exploring which research methods have been used successfully. The 5- stage integrative review process includes: Problem identification, literature search, integrated data, evaluation, data analysis and interpretation, and presentation of results (para.1).

It's important to understand China's history in the region and other countries historical rights surrounding the South China Sea in international waters. With a clear understanding or a better understanding of the legal rights to international waters, the author looks at the strategic placement of China's artificial islands and its attempts to militarize them. China denies that they are using these islands in a military action towards aggression, but more for defense of China's land. China's artificial islands are being made by dredging the ocean floor surrounding submerged reefs. Once the islands are sufficiently solid, they cement the area and claim it as

China's land and state their right to defend it. China is placing anti-aircraft guns and radar apparatus while building runways around structures that could house large numbers of troops. If research supports that China is militarizing these artificial islands all must recognize China's potential military buildup and the threat it imposes to surrounding Nations and the international community in international waters. The United States needs to support its allies in the region and attempts to discuss diplomatic solutions while taking steps to protecting our interest and those we support in the region. Research has been conducted to review policies and discuss current sanctions and potential options to apply pressure to China or to get them to the table for a peaceful solution. The U.S must also consider potential military options and actions regarding its Naval fleet and troop placement by the United States and its allies. Researching articles related to the questions below, examines information that is indirectly and directly related to getting background information on international waters rights of way and legal determinations that support or deny China's claims to the artificial islands they are building and claiming as Chinese sovereignty. This research also explored the possible evidence of China arming these artificial islands and the militarization impact it will have in the region. Further research examines the ways to approach China and stabilize the region as well as examining ways to potentially defend the rights of the United States and the rights of their allies in the region.

The primary research question of this study is: What is the strategic impact of the artificial islands on the United States and China relations in the region of the South China Sea?

The following secondary questions are also explored in this study:

1. How and why China built these artificial Islands?
2. What are the laws concerning international waterways?

3. What are the potential strategic impacts of these artificial islands and how they affect U.S and China relations?

4. How U.S and China's actions regarding the artificial islands in the South China Sea are transforming the region and potentially raising tensions?

### **Literature Search**

This thesis is an integrative literature review of various perspectives of different authors of previous scholarly articles discussing the building of these artificial islands in the international waterways. Existing literature at times does not provide a clear analysis regarding classified data and information. According to Salmon (2019) "many search strategies will yield far more literature than any researcher, or team, can read. There are ethical dimensions to choosing what to focus on. Bias can creep in here: it is important to read literature representing a good spread of views and opinions, not only those you agree with. Then, when you have chosen what to read, it is ethically necessary to read that work carefully" (Salmon, 2019, para. 4). This study uses an integrative and systematic review of existing research critiques, and synthesizes existing data directly related to this study. The following online databases were searched utilizing relevant key terms: South China Sea, artificial islands, current events in the SCS, construction of the artificial islands, geopolitics surrounding the SCS. Research was conducted using data from Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), World Bank Key Development Data Statistics, and Airbus Intelligence.

Research was conducted on the construction of these artificial islands and international waterway laws in the region and how these artificial islands are affecting U.S and China relations. This review encompasses theoretical and empirical source criteria that could be used for inclusion/exclusion for this thesis. A preliminary review of the literature was conducted to



identify search terms relevant to the subject areas. The researcher concluded that the most relevant results were found using the following key words: “artificial islands” “South China Sea”, “laws of International waterways” “militarization of artificial islands”, “current events in the South China Sea”.

The research contains an analyses and synthesis of the data that will draw parallels, point out inconsistencies and contradictions that makes a conclusion in terms of the impact that these artificial islands are having in the region of the South China sea.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles published in English only, original research, systematic review, literature review, theoretical and conceptual articles. The researcher included all results from 2001 to 2020. The initial literature search produced a total of 150 citations.

Once search results were compiled, the author screened each title and abstract. After review, the decision to include or exclude was documented. The author screened titles and abstracts of each citation with a focus on the research topic. After a review of all articles, 42 studies were chosen for inclusion in the integrative review.

### **Limitations**

The study results were limited to the articles contained in the databases searched. Each database was intentionally searched because of the depth of the research content. The reader should note that additional resources relevant to the topic may exist.

### **Data Evaluation**

In an integrative review, four questions guided the research on the topic of discussion: How China built these artificial Islands? What are the laws concerning international waterways? What are the potential strategic impacts of these artificial islands and how they affect U.S and

China relations? What are the current events in the region and how are they affecting the region?

In this research project, the researcher included only scholarly, peer reviewed articles.

### **Data analysis and interpretation**

Data was reviewed by content and topics related to the artificial islands in the South China Sea were isolated and categorized. Consistent with Whitmore and Knafl's (2005) methodology, data was analyzed inductively through identification of significant patterns or content, themes related to the artificial islands in the South China Sea were isolated. This integrative process applies a , and verification stages (Whitmore and Knafl, 2005), with a continued focus on the research question which is "What is the Impact of China's Artificial Islands in the South China Sea and how its affecting U.S and China Relations?".

This researcher will identify issues "related to specifying the review purpose, searching the literature, evaluating data from primary sources, analyzing data, and presenting the results are discussed. Data analysis methods of qualitative research are proposed as strategies that enhance the rigor of combining diverse methodologies as well as empirical and theoretical sources in an integrative review" (Whitmore and Knafl, 2005, para. 3).

### Chapter Three: Findings

This integrative review of the scholarly literature resulted in four key findings that are discussed in detail further.

**Finding one: The reason behind China's strategic decision to build these artificial islands is to increase its military capabilities and international trade advantages and control the South China Sea (SCS).**

Nicol, (2017) states "by transforming reefs and cays into military installations, China is extending its military capabilities in the South China Sea. Airstrips, radar arrays, and all such buildings give China the ability to project force throughout the region" (Nicol, 2017, para. 9).

Japanese scholar Taoka Shunji (2015) states:

in a journal article that when it came to China's advance in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands, the assumption amongst many Japanese people that the territory of the Philippines was being invaded was incorrect. According to him, "in the 1898 Treaty of Paris in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the US, the object of cession was east of 118 degrees longitude (116 in the South); and the Spratly Islands fall outside (West) of that line. The US therefore did not claim these islands to be the US territory when in 1938 Japan declared them to be Japanese territory and incorporated them as connected to Taiwan under the name of 'Shinnan Gunto'. The Japanese government now considers the territorial status of these islands 'undetermined. (para.14).

Nicol (2017) states that "The Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) published a report claiming that China has installed weapon platforms on the island, based on recent satellite images. These weapons include large anti-aircraft guns and probable close-in weapons systems (CIWS)," (para. 18). These type of weapon systems are used to shoot down nearby

aircraft or used for defense. Why is China weaponizing these islands? Do they have a long-term goal? Will they use these artificial islands as launching pads for invasion? There are many more questions yet answered. It is no wonder surrounding countries are concerned with China's expansion.

Here are more potential reasons why China might be expanding in the region. According to Nicol (2017):

the South China Sea is one of the busiest trade routes in the world. According to information gathered by the council on Foreign Relations, more than \$5.3 trillion worth of shipping travels through the sea each year; \$1.2 trillion of this trade belongs to the United States. Beyond its importance as a trade route, the South China Sea may also contain bountiful resources beneath the surface. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates that there are 11 billion barrels of oil in the South China Sea, as well as 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. As East Asia continues to grow in importance, these resources — and who gets to control them — will become more important (paras. 10-11).

Nicol (2017) also states the region is also one of the most important fishing zones in the world. In fact:

12 percent of the global catch comes from the South China Sea. Astonishing as it may sound, this may be a far bigger point of contention than the fuel reserves. Fishing is a crucial industry for China, which is currently the largest producer of fish in the world. China accounts for 17.4 percent of the world's marine catch, nearly three times that of runner up Indonesia, according to a report from the Center for Naval Analyses. China is

also the world's biggest exporter of fish products, with nearly \$20 billion in exports in 2013 (para.12).

China now has six reefs that have structures that are or could house military personnel and radar structures. They have; Fiery Cross Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Johnson South Reef, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, and Gaven Reef. All these reefs sit right in the middle of the South China Sea which is the biggest shipping lane for all countries. In addition, these reefs have military capabilities such as runways, troop housing along with safe harbors for ships and radar capabilities and anti-aircraft guns. It is no wonder why all the surrounding countries feel threatened by China's encroachment.

**Finding Two: China's artificial islands have negatively impacted the coastal lines sovereignty of the neighboring countries.**

The UN Convention on the law of the sea (UNCLOS) creates the legal guidance for all use of the oceans. Beckman (2013) explains that "Brunei Darussalam, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are the claimant states that have competing claims to territorial sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea" (pg. 142, para 2).

Figure #6: The South China Sea with Adjacent States and Territorial Claims



Maritime Zones under the UNCLOS state that “Coastal states have sovereignty over their land territory as well as over a 12 nm belt of sea adjacent to their coasts called the territorial sea” (Beckman, 2013, p.145). There are questions from all surrounding countries of whether the straight baselines of the bordering states around the South China Sea are in line with the UNCLOS provisions:

Article 6 of the Convention provides that the normal baseline for measuring the breadth of the territorial sea is the low-water line along the coast. Article 7 provides that in particular circumstances, states may employ straight base lines. The baselines employed by China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam, have been, on various occasions, questioned by third parties such as the United States (Beckman, 2013, p.146).

The main issue for discussion is the question of when using straight baselines is whether they limit the rights of passage for foreign vessels? The rule is that waters from

land and 12 nautical miles out are internal waters, which would mean that foreign vessels would have to request permission to enter. China is essentially building these artificial islands and claiming them as sovereignty and expecting the 12 nm belt of sea as territorial sea. Coastal states are also entitled to other maritime zones including contiguous zones and exclusive economic zones (EEZ), and a continental shelf. All states bordering the South China Sea claim a territorial sea, an EEZ, and a continental shelf from their baselines along their main coasts and the precise limits of their EEZ and continental shelf claims aren't clearly identified. With a 200 nm exclusive economic zone you can understand the concern neighboring countries have over these artificial islands and China's claim of sovereignty over them. China now claims these artificial islands as sovereignty and expects maritime zones to apply as well.

UNCLOS makes important distinctions between offshore geographic features such as; (1), islands, (2) rocks, (3) low-tide elevations, (4) artificial islands, installations, and structures, and (5) submerged features (Beckman, 2013, p.149).

Article 121 states:

1. An island is a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide.
2. Except as provided for in paragraph 3, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of an island are determined in accordance with the provisions of this Convention applicable to other land territory.
3. Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf (Usuki, 2015, p. 153).

Borger & Phillips state that “China’s claims on the Spratlys and the Paracel islands to the north, are based more on historic settlement rather than geographical proximity. As the regime in Beijing has built up its long-distance “blue water” navy it has become increasingly assertive, bolstering its claims with accelerating construction work, and shrugging off calls for a regional negotiation settlement on the Spratlys’ future” (para.4.)

Borger & Phillips also state “there are legal issues, but China’s standing is weak. Other countries’ have equally strong, if not stronger, historical claims. Beijing is also ignoring the UN Convention on Law of the Sea and is dodging multilateral negotiated solutions, preferring to create “facts on the sea”. That raises the question of how far Washington D.C. is prepared to go in calling China’s bluff” (para.8).

International Policy Digest reported that “China is quietly attempting to build an artificial island upon the Johnson South Reef in the Spratly Islands. Furthermore, Beijing is also planning similar activities in several other reefs of this archipelago. This is a dangerous intrigue and might give China significant advantages in SCS disputes. (Nguyen, 2014, para.1).

Philippines former National Security Adviser, Roilo Golez states:

Chinese jets can easily reach the entire Philippines, Vietnam, and parts of Malaysia within Fiery Cross’s 1,000-mile radius. Consequently, the national security of these countries will be seriously threatened. Furthermore, a chain of artificial islands in the Spratlys will form a block allowing China to strengthen its air and maritime surveillance in the SCS” (Nguyen, 2014, para 8).

The South China Sea is one of the most used sea lanes and is recently becoming a center of political tensions because of China’s attempt to legitimize their claims to expand their territory and reduce the abilities of other Countries to navigate in international waters. The United States



created a treaty of mutual defense with the Philippines in 1951 and the artificial islands could draw the United States to support the defense of the Philippines legal claims. Economic Times (2014) reports that “China claims sovereignty over almost the whole of the South China Sea, which is also claimed in part by Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines and is believed to sit atop vast oil and gas deposits” (para. 1). Vietnam and China continue to argue over oil exploration, fishing rights and ownership of the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Economic Times also reports that Vietnam states that “the artificial islands fall into its 200-nautical-mile economic zone. China has also announced its intention of moving their first oil rig into the disputed South China Sea. Tensions are rising on all fronts in the disputed area” (para. 7).

In 2013, the Philippines grew frustrated with arbitration attempts with China regarding maritime disputes surrounding the artificial islands and they filed a case against China's claims. Tetsuo (2016) states that:

In October 2015, the Tribunal issued an Award on Jurisdiction and Admissibility, deciding some issues of jurisdiction and deferring others for further consideration. On July 12, 2016, the Tribunal made the final award. It accepted most of jurisdiction and denied Chinese historic rights in the nine-dash line, clarified the legal status of some features in the South China Sea, concluded that there is no island in the Spratly Islands that can produce an EEZ or continental shelf, and found most of Chinese activities, including law enforcement and marine environmental destruction in the South China Sea unlawful under UNCLOS and other international law (para. 20).

Even though the Hague ruled against China's claim, the tribunal has no way to enforce its decision. China's rejection of the Award poses a huge challenge to the UNCLOS regime. Tetsuo (2016) also states the:

UNCLOS is a package deal among navigational rights, sovereign rights, and compulsory dispute settlement. As a party to UNCLOS, China accepted the compulsory dispute settlement mechanism while enjoying navigational rights in the world waters and sovereign rights in its EEZs and continental shelf. If the international community accepts China's position, that would lead to the collapse of the package deal and the entire UNCLOS regime" (para.23).

This ruling can raise existing tensions with China's neighbors and the U.S. Fravel (2017) states:

China's vigorous assertion of maritime claims can threaten its neighbors and push them toward closer relations with the United States. Likewise, U.S. involvement in the South China Sea can threaten China's position in the disputes and can even embolden states facing China, creating strong incentives for Beijing to push back (pg. 234).

Free navigation in international waters is important to all countries that trade in the SCS region.

**Finding Three: The impact of China building these artificial islands in the South China Sea have negatively affected relations between China and U.S and their allies, raising tensions in regard to freedom of the seas operations in the SCS.**

China wants to control all the South China Sea because they see it as China's own property. They state that they are prepared to defend all their land whether it be real or artificial. Yale University Professor John Lewis Gaddis defines grand strategy as "the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities." (Mourdoukoutas, 2019, para.6). This could mean that China is biting off more than it can chew. Mourdoukotas, (2019)

also states “China may have a dot, a couple of artificial islands, but it does not have a second dot to draw a line. They are one country against all the other nations with interests in the region: the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam” (para.13). China cannot forget that other countries such as the Navies of US, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia who want to enforce the freedom of international trade waters. Forbes also reports that “China has made great progress in building its military and naval capabilities” says Yannis Tsinas, a retired Washington diplomat and Greek naval officer. “But it isn’t in any position to fight the US and its allies.” (Mourdoukotas, 2019, para.16).

China’s island-building efforts require a heavy investment in engineering and infrastructure. Digital Trends (2017) reports that:

The Spratly Islands and other nearby chains lack indigenous populations. As such, they are claimed by the various neighboring nations. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and China all claim portions of the South China Sea, but China’s claim is extraordinary.

Dubbed the “nine-dash line,” China’s claim (as presented to the United Nations in 2009) covers most of the sea, extending down to the coast of Malaysia (Nicol, 2017, para. 9).

China is extending its military capabilities into the South China Sea. Airstrips, radar arrays, and all buildings give China the ability to project force throughout the region. Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) published a report claiming that “China has installed weapon platforms on the island, based on recent satellite images. These weapons include “large anti-aircraft guns and probable close-in weapons systems (CIWS) which are designed to shoot down nearby missiles and aircraft” (Nicol, 2017, para.19). This author is guessing that they would be the last line of defense against cruise missiles launched by any country threatening its installations. NBC News reports that:

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular news briefing in Beijing that he "did not understand, the situation referred to in the report. Beijing says the manufactured islands are intended to boost maritime safety in the region while downplaying their military utility. They also mark China's claim to ownership of practically the entire South China Sea, its islands, reefs and other maritime features (Flanagan, 2016, para.10).

NBC News (2016) also reports that "The Center for Strategic and International Studies said in a report late Wednesday that the anti-aircraft guns and close-in weapons systems designed to guard against missile attack have been placed on all seven of China's newly created islands" (Flanagan, 2016, para.2). The South China Sea is one of the busiest trade routes in the world. Per information gathered by the council on Foreign Relations, NBC News commented that "more than \$5.3 trillion worth of shipping travels through the sea each year; \$1.2 trillion of this trade belongs to the United States (Flanagan, 2016, para.12). Nicol (2017) also states that the other reasons China is interested in controlling the SCS is that:

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates that there are 11 billion barrels of oil in the South China Sea, as well as 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. As East Asia continues to grow in importance, these resources — and who gets to control them — will become more important. The region is also one of the most important zones in the world for fishing. In fact, 12 percent of the global catch comes from the South China Sea. Astonishing as it may sound, this may be a far bigger point of contention than the fuel reserves. Fishing is a crucial industry for China, which is currently the largest producer of fish in the world. China accounts for 17.4 percent of the world's marine catch, nearly three times that of runner up Indonesia, according to a report from the

Center for Naval Analyses. China is also the world's biggest exporter of fish products, with nearly \$20 billion in exports in 2013 (para.13).

Teshu Singh (2012) states "the region has become a source of renewed interstate rivalries because the issue has become closely associated with interrelated issues of energy, territorial, maritime and military security" (para.19).

**Finding Four: China's artificial Islands have created tensions in the region involving the surrounding countries and the U.S. Dispute Dynamics between all those involved in operating in the SCS have increased and are fluidly changing every day.**

Wikipedia (2011) reports that:

On 20 July 2011, the PRC, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam agreed a set of preliminary guidelines on the implementation of the DOC (Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea) which would help resolve disputes. The agreement was described by the PRC's assistant foreign minister, Liu Zhenmin, as "an important milestone document for cooperation among China and ASEAN countries. Some of the early drafts acknowledged aspects such as "marine environmental protection, scientific research, safety of navigation and communication, search and rescue and combating transnational crime", although the issue of oil and natural gas drilling remains unresolved. "Following the spirit of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), China and ASEAN countries actively advanced the consultations on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea, with the forecast that the COC will be completed by 2021 (Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, para.14).

Wikipedia.org reported that:

In 2012, the United States State Department press statement identified the PRC as an assertive state in the region and communicated the United States worries about the developments in the area. Also, in 2012, Secretary Clinton testified in support of congressional approval of the Law of the Sea Convention, which would strengthen U.S. ability to support countries that oppose Chinese claims to certain islands in the area (Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, para. 51)

Wikipedia.org also reported:

In July 2012, “the United States Senate passed resolution 524, initially sponsored by Senator John Kerry, stating (among other things) the United States' strong support for the 2002 declaration of conduct of parties in the South China Sea, reaffirms the United States' commitment to assist the nations of Southeast Asia to remain strong and independent, and supports enhanced operations by the United States armed forces in the Western Pacific (Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, para.52).

According to Wikipedia.org:

In 2014, the United States responded to China's claims over the fishing grounds of other nations by saying that "China has not offered any explanation or basis under international law for these extensive maritime claims." China responded by asking “the United States to maintain a neutral position on the issue. In 2014 and 2015, the United States continued freedom of navigation operations, including in the South China Sea” para). Shortly thereafter “on 27 October 2015, the US destroyer USS Lassen navigated within 12 nautical miles of reclaimed land in the Subi Reef as the first in a series of Freedom of Navigation Operations. This is the first time since 2012 that the US has directly challenged China's claims of territorial limit”. Then in November 2015, “two US B-52

strategic bombers flew near artificial Chinese-built islands in the area of the Spratly Islands and were contacted by Chinese ground controllers but continued their mission undeterred” (Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, para.53).

As of May 2019, in an article from The Diplomat states “the United States has conducted four freedom of navigation operations in the Spratlys during the early 2019 (Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, para.54).

In 2019, The Diplomat reported that “The U.S. Navy confirmed the operation to Reuters, noting that two Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers, USS Preble and USS Chung Hoon, sailed within 12 nautical miles of Gaven and Johnson Reefs” (Panda, 2019, para.1). China reacted angrily to the operation, “Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing. China urges the United States to stop such provocative actions,” Geng added” (Panda, 2019, para.3). Ankit Panda (2019) states “China claims most of the South China Sea under its capacious nine-dash line claim. Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia also have competing claims in the Spratly Islands” (para.4). With U.S.-China tensions being high on trade the U.S. President Donald J. Trump tweeted “a threat to increase tariffs on Beijing” (para.5).

June 2020, Fox News reported, “the U.S. Navy is operating three aircraft carriers in the Pacific which appears to be a strong show of force following Chinese movements and comments regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea” (Osborn, 2020, para.1). Fox news also reports “The move, which includes the USS Theodore Roosevelt, USS Nimitz and USS Ronald Reagan, brings an unusually strong U.S. presence. This kind of message has not been seen in recent years, and it signals the fast-increasing significance of U.S. deterrence efforts regarding China” (Osborn, 2020, para 2).

“The Global Times, a Chinese-backed paper, also makes specific reference to China’s well known “carrier killer” DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship missiles. Much has been discussed regarding these weapons, as they are regularly reported to operate with a range of 900 miles, a distance which some say could force U.S. carriers to operate at much farther standoff ranges” (Osborn, 2020, para.4).

Politico (2018) reports that Chinese colleagues have stated “if the U.S. continues to sail through and over-fly what they see as their waters, China will eventually shoot down the offending aircraft” (Morgan, W. & Chan M., 2018, para.4). Politico also states that “U.S. military leaders insist that they are determined to avoid that. Navy Admiral. Phil Davidson, the U.S commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, told Politico he’s eager to open a new dialogue with his Chinese counterparts, contending that a military to military relationship is quite important” (Morgan, W. & Chan M., 2018, para.5). Marine General Joe Dunford states “ what we are doing is preserving the principle of open access to the global commons, violating international norms, standards and the law should know that they are going to pay a cost that is higher than whatever they hope to gain” (Morgan, W. & Chan M., 2018, para.6). Politico states “Beijing’s leaders are not backing down from their military expansion in the vast South China Sea, which stretches more than 1.3 million square miles with trillions of dollars’ worth of trade transiting annually” (Morgan, W. & Chan M., 2018, para 9). Politico reports:

Despite public assurances from President XI Jinping that the features would not be militarized, China recently deployed surface-to-air missiles and other weapons and equipment. Earlier this year, satellite images showed that Beijing has built at least four airstrips suitable for military aircraft on Woody Island, as well as the reefs in the



archipelago known as Fiery Cross, Mischief and Subi” (Morgan, W. & Chan M., 2018, para.10).

June 2020, News18 reports the leaders of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) took the position in a statement issued by Vietnam Saturday on behalf of the 10-nation bloc. “We have reaffirmed that the 1982 UNCLOS is the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interest over maritime zones” the ASEAN statement sent (para.3).

July 2020, CNN reporter Ryan Brown reports “the USS Nimitz and USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Groups are conducting dual carrier operations in the Philippine Sea and South China Sea,” (News 18, July 2020, para.2). Browne (2020) reports that Lt. Joe Jeiley, a spokesman for the Seventh Fleet states “the presence of two carriers is not in response to any political or world events. This advanced capability is one of many ways the U.S. Navy promotes security, stability, and prosperity throughout the Indo-Pacific” (CNN, 2020, para.1). Brown (2020) also reports that “the exercise is long planned but comes as China conducts military drills of its own in the area, near the contested Paracel Islands, exercises that have been criticized by the US and other countries” (para.3). CNN also reported that “While the US Navy routinely operates in the area, the operation of two nuclear-powered aircraft carriers -- the USS Nimitz and USS Ronald Reagan -- represents a significant show of force and comes amid heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing over a number of areas, including Hong Kong” (Browne, 2020, para.9).

July 2020, News18 reports “Vietnam and the Philippines have also criticized the planned Chinese drills, warning they could create tension in the region and impact Beijing's relationship with its neighbors” (para.1). News18 also reports “the United States accuses China of

miniaturizing the South China Sea and trying to intimidate Asian neighbors who might want to exploit its extensive oil and gas reserves” (para.9). News 18 also mentioned that “China claims 90% of the potentially energy-rich South China Sea, but Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also lay claim to parts of it, through which about \$3 trillion of trade passes each year” (para.10).

When and if it comes to conflict, David Arase (2017) states “if the U.S. and China cannot reach some kind of strategic accommodation, they will continue to move toward this outcome. Meanwhile, other stakeholders may be forced to choose sides if or when a confrontation materializes” (Showdown ahead, JSTOR, p.76).

### Chapter Four: Discussion

The chapter elaborates on the four findings discussed in chapter three surrounding the artificial islands in the South China Sea.

Guinto (2014) states:

First, "Sand, cement, wood, and steel are China's weapons of choice as it asserts its claim over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea". All these countries including China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Brunei have argued for decades over ownership of the 100 islands and reefs. Business Week wrote that "in recent months, vessels belonging to the People's Republic have been spotted ferrying construction materials to build new islands in the sea. Artificial islands could help China anchor its claim to waters that host some of the world's busiest shipping lanes" (para.1-2).

Saunders (2019) states:

artificially created islands are a contemporary reality, created and used for military and nonmilitary purposes. Analysis of such islands has largely been limited to their status under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regime. Their position under general international law, however, remains unclear. In particular, the question of whether artificial islands can constitute sovereign territory remains unanswered (p.643).

Saunders (2019) mentions that "The Pentagon estimates that since early 2014, China has reclaimed over 3,200 acres of land in the Spratly Islands archipelago to build new artificial structures around existing maritime features. The Pentagon asserts that these actions "do not provide China with any additional territorial or maritime rights within the South China Sea." (p.644).

Saunders (2019) also states that:

Artificial islands built illegally (such as those in another state's EEZ, or those that have been built in breach of international environmental law), the building state is unable to acquire title to the territory, unless their occupation is legitimized by the international community. As such, continued protest around such illegally built artificial islands is vital" (p.684).

Beckman (2013) states:

the second finding surrounds "coastal states that have sovereignty over their land territory as well as over a 12 nm belt of sea adjacent to their coasts called the territorial sea. Coastal states are also entitled to their maritime zones beyond their territorial seas, including a contiguous zone, an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and a continental shelf" also states All of the states bordering the South China Sea, as well as Taiwan, claim a territorial sea, an EEZ, and a continental shelf measured from the baselines along their mainland coasts or, in the case of Indonesia and the Philippines, from their archipelagic baselines. Unless China decides to bring its maritime claims into conformity with UNCLOS, serious differences will remain between the position of China and that of the Philippines and Vietnam on how UNCLOS applies to the maritime claims in the South China Sea. If China continues to assert its claims to maritime space in a manner that the Philippines and Vietnam believe is not consistent with UNCLOS, their only recourse may be to attempt to bring China before an international court or tribunal to obtain a legally binding decision that China's actions are contrary to UNCLOS (p.161). The journal of international law also states although UNCLOS is of no assistance in resolving the territorial sovereignty claims to islands in the South China Sea, it contains important rules

and principles that govern the validity of claims with respect to the South China Sea itself, including marine features and areas, and has important provisions regarding the management and resolution of disputes that may arise in that respect. The journal of international law states unless China is willing to bring its maritime claims into conformity with UNCLOS, it will continue on a legal collision course. In that event its ASEAN neighbors may conclude that, because they cannot match the political, economic, and military power of China, they have no recourse but to attempt to invoke the dispute settlement system in UNCLOS in order to challenge the legality of China's maritime claims (p.163).

Zha, 2001 states the third finding is that:

The geographical location of the South China Sea also makes it a "security concern" to nation-states that are not a direct party to the sovereignty disputes. To the south, the Strait of Malacca connects the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. To the north, the Taiwan Strait connects the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean. For centuries, these geographical connections have made the South China Sea significant for European commercial and military adventures in continental East Asia" (p.36).

Rowan (2011) wrote in the University of California Press that states:

the geopolitical considerations in the South China Sea is the world's second-busiest international shipping lane. Each year, more than half of the world's supertanker traffic passes through the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, with the majority of seafaring traffic continuing on to China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. This shipping is primarily raw materials and energy resources—crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), coal, and iron ore—en route to these East Asian nations. With respect to oil and LNG, the

amount transported through the South China Sea is three times greater than that traveling through the Suez Canal and 15 times greater than the amount transported through the Panama Canal. The majority of this crude oil comes from the Persian Gulf and is bound for Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (p.416).

Figure #7: Potential oil reserves and natural gas in the SCS and rising tensions along with military buildup could spell disaster.

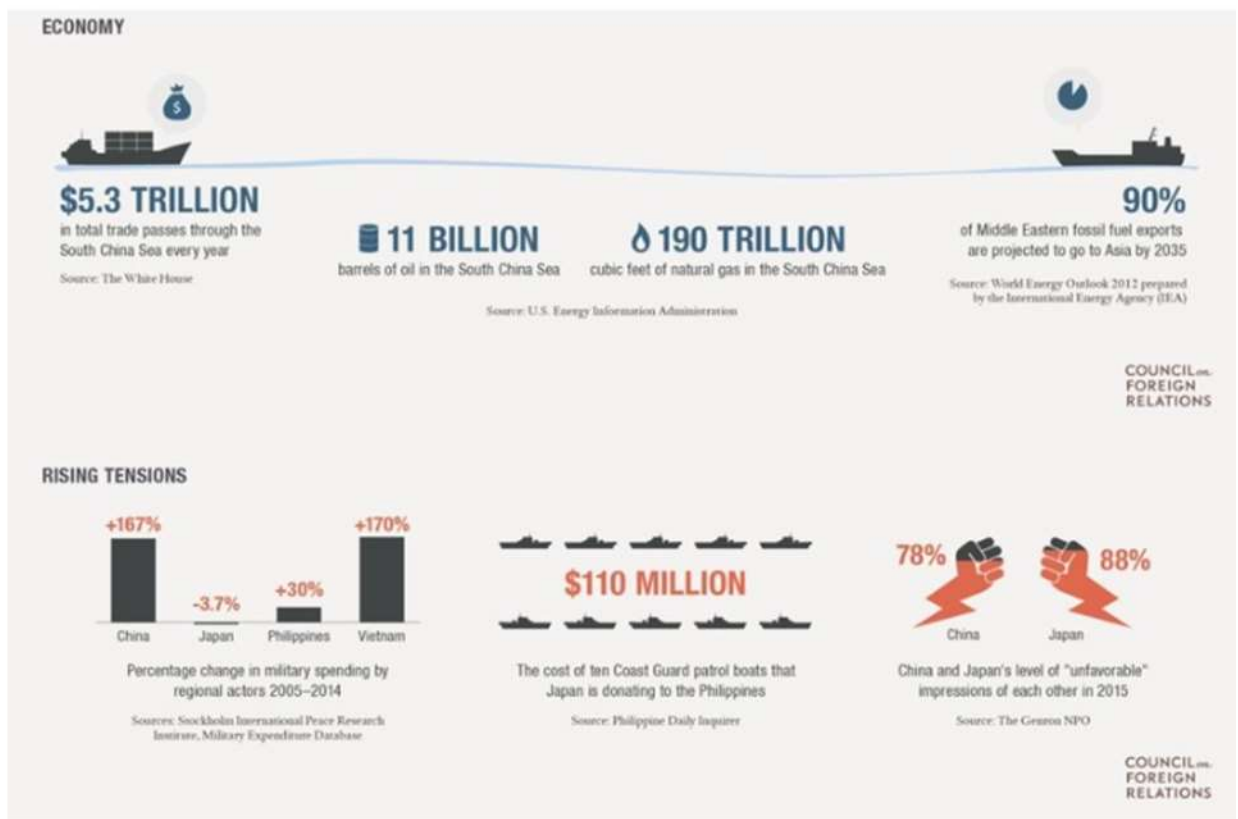


Image: Council on Foreign Relations

In addition, Rowan (2011) mentions:

its importance as a shipping lane, the South China Sea region contains potentially vast oil reserves. Oil deposits have been found in many of the continental shelves surrounding the sea. Currently, this region retains proven oil reserves of seven

billion barrels and a production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day. The discovery of oil in adjacent littoral countries has fueled speculation that there could be a massive reserve, located near several nations with growing demand for oil. But because there has been no exploratory drilling near the Spratly and Paracel Islands, there are no proven oil reserves for those areas and estimates vary greatly (p.417).

Nguyen (2014) states:

According to the Philippines former National Security Adviser, Roilo Golez, Chinese jets can easily reach the entire Philippines, Vietnam, and parts of Malaysia within Fiery Cross's 1,000-mile radius. Consequently, the national security of these countries will be seriously threatened. Furthermore, a chain of artificial islands in the Spratlys will form a block allowing China to strengthen its air and maritime surveillance in the SCS. Like Roilo Golez said, China will then have a strong incentive to establish an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the SCS, similar to the one in the East China Sea (para.8).

The fourth finding discusses events that have occurred in the SCS and how they are raising tensions in the region. Challeney (2018) stated in the Japan Times that:

the Chinese did not leave that outcome to chance. Before they began building their islands in the South China Sea, they spent several months testing possible U.S. reactions through symbolic moves:

A. June 2012, China seized the disputed Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines, without eliciting a tangible international response.

B. In September 2013, China launched its next test: It sent the Tianjing dredger to Cuarteron Reef, where it stayed for three weeks without initiating any land reclamation.

The United States, under President Barack Obama, did not push back, emboldening China to start its first island-building project, at Johnson South Reef. Obama's last defense secretary, Ash Carter, has criticized his former boss's soft approach toward China. In a recent essay, Carter wrote that Obama, "misled" by his own analysis, viewed as suspect "recommendations from me and others to more aggressively challenge China's excessive maritime claims and other counterproductive behaviors (para.6-11).

Chellaney (2018) states, "President Donald Trump's administration is grappling with the consequences of Obama's approach. Trump wants to implement a vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific." The "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy is the successor to Obama's unhinged "pivot" to Asia" (para.12).

Japan Times also mentions that "from its newly built perches in the South China Sea, China is better positioned not only to sustain air and sea patrols in the region, but also to advance its strategy of projecting power across the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. How can there be any hope of a free and open Indo-Pacific, when the critical corridor linking the Indian and Pacific oceans is increasingly dominated by the world's largest autocracy?" (Chellaney, 2018, para.13).

Japan times mentions that:

China's territorial grab, a triumph of brute power over rules, exposes the vulnerability of the current liberal world order. The geopolitical and environmental toll is likely to rise, major costs on the region's states and reshaping international maritime relations imposing. Major costs on the region's states and reshaping international maritime relations" (Chellaney, 2018, para.14).



**China perspective**

Center for a New American Security wrote:

China's broadest objectives are visible in the statements of Xi Jinping and the Chinese government. They include: achieving national reunification (not just with Hong Kong and Macao but also Taiwan—which puts Taiwan in a unique position as both a rival claimant and a claimed territory); defending sovereignty, including territories and waters claimed as part of China; preserving the power of the CCP; returning China to center stage in international affairs; and achieving the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation, which is most often defined in economic terms such as building a moderately prosperous society and making a modern socialist country.

From broad national goals, concrete objectives regarding the South China Sea and Southeast Asia can also be culled from official statements or deduced from Beijing's actions. These include:

- a. Control claimed territory (disputed islets and waters) and prevent rival claimants (especially the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia) from increasing control over the same
- b. Increase control over the airspace and seas of the South China Sea and seek to overwhelm regional militaries (including those of the claimant states as well as those of Singapore and Indonesia)
- c. Control the resources within the nine-dash line area and decrease the control of those resources by others
- d. Legitimize China's policies and the CCP at home and abroad ; Delegitimize unfavorable rules (parts of UNCLOS) and rivals (the United States, Japan)

- e. Increase China's influence over regional neighbors' key policies and decrease the influence of others over those neighbors
- f. Coopt regional leaders and build a network of supportive or at least nonaligned clients and weaken unity between the United States and its allies and Southeast Asian states
- g. Develop information superiority through all means and erode other states' advantages in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); innovation; and advanced technology
- h. Preempt or defeat "outside" military intervention into the first island chain (sea control), and, at a minimum, block the same within the second island chain (sea denial)

Center for a New American Security also states, in short, China is seeking to expand its positive control over the South China Sea and Southeast Asia. Leaving aside the unknowable question of future Chinese intentions, the CCP plans to be in the driver's seat in Southeast Asia in the coming years, and the implications for the strategic autonomy of its neighbors and freedom of the seas are both in potential peril (p.14).

### **U.S perspective**

The U.S Naval War College wrote, "today, the situation in the South China Sea is reaching a critical stage as Chinese advances accumulate, America's room for maneuver diminishes, and observers throughout the region wonder whether the United States is up to the challenge. And yet Washington still is searching for a strategy" (Brands, and Cooper, 2019, p.1).

Brands and Cooper also mentions:

So far, the Trump administration too has struggled to articulate an effective approach.

The Trump administration focused on bilateral trade and North Korea as the dominant issues in U.S.-China relations" More importantly they state that "although the U.S

military has conducted freedom-of navigation operations (FONOPs) to challenge China's (and other states') excessive claims, the administration has given the impression—which has been noted in key countries such as Vietnam—that it lacks an overall strategy for addressing Chinese advances (Brands, and Cooper, 2019, p.5).

Business insider reports that:

Trump is trying to shove 4 years of China policy into 4 months. The Trump administration has pivoted from the US's policy of strategic ambiguity toward China, to open rivalry over the last few weeks”

Business insider also reports the recent below actions that the U.S is taking against China;

- Trump is set to sign an order demanding that China based ByteDance sell its US operations of popular app TikTok and said Friday he plans to ban TikTok in the US.
- The US shut down the Chinese consulate in Houston.
- The US placed sanctions on Chinese officials involved with human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.
- The White House is considering banning Communist Party members (roughly 90 million people) from the US.
- The State Department made noise about China's "unlawful" buildup of military bases in the South China Sea.
- The US retaliated against China for a crackdown on US journalists with a crackdown on Chinese journalists in the US” (Lopez, 2020, p.1).

Business week also mentions that “former State Department official told me that Chinese officials understand that Trump is at his most dangerous now. He's looking at his flagging poll numbers, the shortening calendar before the election and trying to impress his base” (Lopez, 2020, p.2).

Lopez (2020) states that:

China needs the US market; the US market is on its knees. It would be nice if the two powers could talk this situation out, but as Guggenheim Investments Chief Investment Officer Scott Miner this move from a policy of strategic ambiguity with China to one of open hostility has made cooperation unlikely (Lopez, L. 2020, p.3).

Fox news states:

the Trump administration has been ramping up pressure against Chinese influence across the globe since the outbreak of COVID-19, which began in China and has drawn accusations that the government covered up the seriousness of the virus until it was too late and the virus became a global pandemic (Shaw, 2020, p.3).

Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo:

went on to cite opposition by Australia to Chinese moves in the South China Sea, as well as other countries taking action to push back against Chinese security threats. Momentum is building to mitigate CCP threats in multilateral settings, too, he said. All 10 ASEAN nations have insisted that South China Sea disputes must be settled on the basis of international law, including [United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea] (Shaw, 2020. Para.5-6).

Pompeo in another Fox news article mentions that "The world will not allow Beijing to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire, America stands with our Southeast Asian allies

and partners in protecting their sovereign rights to offshore resources, consistent with their rights and obligations under international law.” (Mcfall, 2020, para.4).

Fox news also reports that:

Diplomatic relations have further strained due to China's new security laws in Hong Kong, their refusal to sign a nuclear arms trade deal with the U.S. and Russia, as well as in the race to 5G -- in what the U.S. has said would be a massive security threat if China is the first to succeed in its development and partnership with other counties (para.16).

As tensions rise between the U.S. and China, where will it lead? Look below at the Countries that are involved in the SCS dispute and their military force structures to get a better idea of what's involved if it comes down to military action.

Figure #8: Countries involved in the region and their known military assets

A South China Sea Conflict: Implications for European Security | Clingendael Report, March 2016

#### Military Resources of the South China Sea Actors

	 ACTIVE FRONTLINE PERSONNEL	 TOTAL AIRCRAFT	 TOTAL NAVAL STRENGTH
CHINA	2,333,000	2860	673
UNITED STATES	1,400,000	13892	473
JAPAN	247,173	1613	131
PHILIPPINES	220,000	126	120
VIETNAM	412,000	404	65
MALAYSIA	110,000	217	61
INDONESIA	476,000	405	171
TAIWAN	290,000	804	102

Source: [www.globalfirepower.com](http://www.globalfirepower.com); Wikimedia Commons

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The New York Times reported that:

Three different logics have been constructed to substantiate the "China threat" thesis.

First, ideological and cultural factors make China a threat. For people using this logic, the sensible response from the U.S. is, in the short run, a containment policy, and confrontation is possible if needed, in the long run, the promotion of a peaceful transformation within China.

Second, for many realists, even China has shed off its ideological straitjacket, as a great power in size (territory, population, and economy), China must pursue its own interest and respect. Nationalism may still drive China into a course of clash with the United States if the latter refuses to accommodate or share the leadership with China as a rising power.

Third, the collapse of China. Opposed to the previous two perspectives, some people are concerned that if China suffers a Soviet-style sudden-death syndrome and spins out of control, it can create an even worse scenario. The sheer size of the population makes refugee problem, the failed state and the followed crises (warlordism, civil war, crime, proliferation of nuclear weapons, etc) impossible for the world to deal with. Due to these three different considerations, the United States often oscillates from demonization to romanticization of China, from containment to engagement. The U.S.-China relationship has shifted from conflict, to confrontation, to competition and back to conflict, but so rarely features with cooperation. One American China specialist characterizes the

bilateral relationship as "the sweet-and-sour Sino-American relationship. (XIA,2006, para.1-2).

The U.S Naval War College wrote another opinion which states:

What is needed is to elevate the strategic debate by identifying clearly—and assessing rigorously—the main options for countering China’s offensive in the South China Sea.

Four basic strategies are available for steering the proper course in a turbulent South China Sea.

Figure #9: China Sea strategic options

**SUMMARY OF SOUTH CHINA SEA STRATEGIC OPTIONS**

Rollback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically attack Chinese forces in the South China Sea</li> <li>• Blockade Chinese forces on South China Sea features until they withdraw</li> <li>• Apply economic sanctions to force Chinese military to withdraw</li> <li>• Undermine "core" Chinese interests, such as Taiwan, unless China withdraws</li> </ul>
Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land U.S. forces on features controlled by China's neighbors</li> <li>• Provide military support to other South China Sea claimants</li> <li>• Maintain a large regional military presence, especially near Scarborough Shoal</li> <li>• Recognize China's neighbors as rightful claimants of disputed features</li> </ul>
Offset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance U.S. political-military engagement in Southeast Asia</li> <li>• Impose economic/diplomatic penalties in response to Chinese advances</li> <li>• Offset Chinese gains with greater U.S. military deployments</li> <li>• Encourage diplomatic and legal challenges to Chinese activities</li> </ul>
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicly accept Chinese reclamation, construction, and militarization</li> <li>• Cease freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea</li> <li>• Communicate that Washington will not intervene in regional disputes</li> <li>• Clarify that U.S. commitment to the Philippines excludes the South China Sea</li> </ul>

(Brands, and Cooper, 2019, p.2).

The U.S Naval War College reports that:

Containment and offset are not mutually exclusive, however, so the best approach for U.S. policy makers would be to combine the most compelling aspects of these two strategies, while seeking to avoid some of their associated liabilities. Specifically, the United States should contain the most destabilizing Chinese activities while offsetting

and penalizing less threatening behavior. The containment elements of a new strategy would demonstrate that the United States is willing to accept short-term risk—including military risk—to prevent China from coercing regional states and consolidating control of additional features in the South China Sea.

The offsetting elements of the strategy, meanwhile, would seek to ensure that China suffers long-term losses whenever it obtains any short-term gains coercively (Brands, and Cooper, 2019, p.16)

Figure #10: Those countries supporting China in red and blue for opposing China



Source: China Daily

As you can see above, more than 70 countries support China and think the Sea disputes should be resolved through negotiations, not arbitration.

The U.S Naval War College states if the United States wants:

to accomplish even the limited aims of this approach, it must be willing to accept greater risks, incur higher costs, and impose more serious penalties on China than it has been



willing to do to date. America has limped along without a clear or coherent approach in the South China Sea for several years. Now is the time to get serious about strategy—before it is too late” (Brands, and Cooper, 2019, p. 17).

Another avenue of approach from China Focus states:

For example, the institutionalization of the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. “Quad” has yet to take off. In this light, the idea of a “Quad plus two” to include France and Britain seems overly ambitious at this stage. Once the Quad takes concrete shape, Britain and France could, of course, join. They both have important naval assets in the Indo-Pacific (Chellaney, 2018, para.10).

Chellaney (April 2018) states:

The developments in the South China Sea carry far-reaching strategic implications for the Indo-Pacific and for the international maritime order. They also highlight that the biggest threat to maritime peace and security comes from unilateralism, especially altering the territorial or maritime status quo by violating international norms and rules (para.2).

Chellaney (2018) states that the Council on Foreign Relations wrote an article that recommends “in the absence of progress between China and ASEAN on a binding CoC to avert crises in the South China Sea, the United States should encourage ASEAN to develop its own draft CoC containing risk-reduction measures and a dispute-resolution mechanism (para.8).

The CFR also states that:

the United States should continue to help the Philippines and Vietnam enhance their maritime policing and security capabilities, for example through better surveillance systems, so they can deter and respond to China entering the water and airspace in their

EEZs with impunity. Similar assistance should be extended to Malaysia if requested (para.9).

Glaser (2015) states that:

The United States should be prepared to respond to future Chinese coercive acts including using U.S. naval forces to deter China's continuing use of "white hulled" paramilitary vessels. Other responses, such as imposing economic sanctions on Chinese energy companies should they drill in contested waters, are also conceivable but should not be specified in advance. The United States should state clearly and publicly that a declaration of an ADIZ by Beijing over the South China Sea would be destabilizing and would not be recognized by Washington. To further reduce the risk of an accident between U.S. and Chinese forces, the two militaries should implement their joint commitment to conclude an agreement on air-to-air encounters by the end of the year" (Conflict in the South China Sea. (para.10).

The Center of Foreign Relations (CFR) states that:

U.S. interests in the South China Sea include freedom of navigation, unimpeded passage for commercial shipping, and peaceful resolution of territorial disputes according to international law. Failure to respond to Chinese coercion or use of force could damage U.S. credibility, not only in Southeast Asia, but also in Japan, where anxiety about intensified activity by Chinese military and paramilitary forces is growing. Conflict in the South China Sea would put at risk the more than \$5 trillion in trade that passes through those strategic waters annually. Also at stake is the U.S. relationship with China, including Washington's efforts to gain

greater cooperation from Beijing on global issues such as combatting terrorism, dealing with epidemics, confronting climate change, securing a deal on Iran's nuclear program, and persuading North Korea to relinquish its nuclear weapons (Glaser, 2015, para.6 ).

Glaser, (2015) also states that “to further reduce the risk of an accident between U.S. and Chinese forces, the two militaries should implement their joint commitment to conclude an agreement on air-to-air encounters by the end of the year” (para.12).

This topic is very fluid and relevant to the future of the United States and China relations. Events are occurring as we speak, and history is being written. The future of our Nation is at risk and the American people are focused on local politics. The SCS is a powder keg waiting to explode and nobody is aware because American news is focused on internal politics and political agendas. This thesis was written to inform the American people of the potential crisis in the South China Sea and the impact it could have on the current trade war and geopolitical climate as it revolves unknowingly around us. The author really thinks that China needs the United States for trade purposes, and the author thinks both sides need each other which will reduce the risk of conflict.

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Appendix B

FINAL APPROVAL FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

(10/20/2020)

We hereby recommend that the thesis of Steven Roy entitled THE STRATEGIC IMPACT OF CHINA'S ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON U.S AND CHINA RELATIONS be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Leadership Studies.



\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Advisor

Elizabeth

\_\_\_\_\_ Second Reader

Accepted



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