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STRATEGIC REBALANCING: SINO-US INTERPLAY IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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ABSTRACT

For the last three-decade, the United is acting as a hegemon in the world. Largely it has established the rules of world politics with its allies. Even in some areas (an example is the Iraq war), it acted unilaterally to achieve its foreign policy goals. But with the rise of China in the last couple of decades the balance of power is changing in some regions. Especially in the South China Sea where the United States has many allies and also its troops, China is asserting its power. The US is no longer the hegemon states in the South China Sea to develop rules of the game. The United States is working passionately to rebalance China in the South China Sea. The results of this rebalancing strategy are still unclear but it has created vulnerabilities for regional peace. This paper will analyze the great powers (the United States and China) competition in the South China Sea. It will explain the effect of this rivalry on regional peace. Secondary data is used in the study. Data was collected from books, research papers, prominent news agencies, and speeches of world leaders.

Keywords: Balance of Power, Deterrence, Strategic Stability, Soft Power, Freedom of Navigation, Second Cold War.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeologically the South China Sea has been a home of territorial battles. States like Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, the Philippines, and Vietnam have dissimilar claims and demands with different rationalizations and reasons in the South China Sea. Currently, China is the main power, which performs as one party and claims her sovereignty genuine only, in Parcels and Spratly Islands.¹ The progression of China's military dexterity, its military transformation of naval forces, huge defense financial plan, and maritime capabilities with a robust economy prescribed her to act like a superpower in the South China Sea. Such hegemonic arrangements of China have stimulated myriad qualms in the United States. Many American regional partners like the Philippines and Vietnam are directly involved in the skirmish of the South China Sea.

The South China Sea is significant in terms of both pecuniary and strategic determinations for Beijing and Washington. Since it is an eventful trade route around the globe. The South China Sea is rich in untapped natural wealth. Hillary Clinton told in 2010, that Washington has a national interest in the South China Sea, realizes the importance of the region in geo-economics and politics.² The vitality of the sea has pinched China near to contest a full-fledged war with other contenders in the region including the current hegemon of the world (US) as well.

At present, Beijing is acting as a hegemon in the South China Sea. Chinese hegemonic strategies in the South China Sea have constrained small countries like Taiwan, and the Philippines to acquire the backing of the US to generate a balance of power in the region. The US detested the hegemonic schemes of Beijing in the South China Sea by issuing threatening statements on the matter of the South China Sea. Altering a subsurface rock into an airstrip merely does not afford the honors of sovereignty. It does not allow fetters on universal air or nautical passage.³ South China Sea is extremely alarmed by the future benefits of the US pre-eminence in the region. Obama administration has reinforced its relationships with the ASEAN group of nations and individual states situated near the South China Sea like Myanmar to rejoiner China in the nearby future.⁴ The US is fronting a hard-hitting balancing act in the South China Sea because China is a key power with a greater soldierly and technology in the area act as one party to this skirmish. The

¹ Aljazeera. 2015. *US navy Spratly sail-by 'threatens China sovereignty'*. october 27. Accessed July 06, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/us-navy-spratly-sail-by-threatens-china-sovereignty>

² Symond, Pytor. 2015. *Syria and the South China Sea: Two Flashpoints for World War*. Nov 27. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/11/27/pers-n27.html>

³ Benner, Tom. 2015. *War of words heats up over South China Sea conflict*. May 31. Accessed june 8, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/31/war-of-words-heats-up-over-south-china-sea-conflict>

⁴ Castro, Renato Cruz De. December 2009. "The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge Against an Emerging China Challenge." *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 31(3).

other competitors in the area like the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, are not influential states and they cannot fight with China in a combined effort.⁵

The latest advances in the South China Sea have displayed the truth that a Sino-US encounter is unavoidable in the area. In October 2015, the US circumnavigated a “guided-missile destroyer”⁶ within 12- nautical miles of the synthetic islets. The first is an arrangement of preparations scheduled to pressure the freedom of navigation in the region. China alerted that the US should “not act blindly or make trouble out of nothing”.⁷

It would be problematic for Washington to generate a balance of power in this area. The US has warned China not to “elbow aside” the states in the South China Sea which are in clash with China.⁸ A straight encounter between China and the US in the area will be frenzied and it will disrupt the state of affairs further. The martial might, defense budget, and the improvement of China in space technology have created a dilemma for US hegemony especially in the Asia Pacific region. Moreover, the Chinese stronghold in South China has been portraying the image in the international community that US-led unipolarity is diminishing whilst China and Russia have also celebrated a new era of multi-polarity back in 2016.⁹

China acts as a hegemon in Asia and it has to turn out to be very difficult for Washington to construct an order similar to post-Soviet disintegration. China has warned that world war is “inevitable” unless the US ceases meddling in the South China Sea-related matters.¹⁰ Like the US, China will not consider international law if it says against the will of China in the South China Sea and related conflicts. China wants to resolve all these teething troubles in the region by might like a superpower in the South China Sea. Although the policies of China in the South China Sea do not threaten the authority of the US in the world as the events are unfolding, the spill-over effect surely will do.¹¹

⁵ Yu, Peter Kien-Hong. 2003. "The Chinese (Broken) U-shaped Line in the South China Sea: Points, Lines, and Zones." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25 (3).

⁶ BBC. 2015. *Q&A: South China Sea dispute*. October 27. Accessed July 8, 2020. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>

⁷ BBC. 2015. *Q&A: South China Sea dispute*. October 27. Accessed July 8, 2020. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>

⁸ BBC. 2015. *Q&A: South China Sea dispute*. October 27. Accessed July 8, 2020. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>

⁹ Jawad K. Shinwari, Khurshaid, Ahmad Ali. 2017. "Pakistan-China Strategic Engagement after 9/11: An Assessment in the Perspective of Indian Ocean." *Pakistan Journal Peace & Conflict Studies* 2 (2): 33-45.

¹⁰ Staff. 2015. *China warns US it could spark war with 'provocative acts' in South China Sea*. October 30. Accessed Nov 30, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/30/us-and-china-agree-to-cooperate-despite-tensions-over-south-china-sea>

¹¹ Tiong, Tan Chin. 2016. "South China Sea Arbitration Response and Implications." *ASEAN Studies Centre* 21: 83-95.

Chinese Interests in the South China Sea

The South China Sea is an imperative area for both economic and strategic drives for great powers. It is, in the same way, important for both PRC and the US to accomplish their hegemonic ambitions in this region of the world. The position of this area has fascinated the superpower and its new contestant China greatly in the world. "South China Sea is to China what the greater Caribbean was to the US in the 19th century and 20th century".¹² China has become a competitor of US superiority all over the world. Through its soft balancing design, China has shaped its unique balancing strategy; China has created its soft image in the Middle East and Africa. China has grasped favor in the Central Asian regions through regional cooperation. Now China wants to uphold its hegemony in the South China Sea. This region is both economically and strategically substantial for China. "More than 50% of the oil tankers of the world pass through this Sea".¹³ In this way, it is the busiest trade route than Panama and Suez Canal. The world's five largest shipping seaports are located in this area. This area is opulent in natural resources, both oil and gas bonds are found in this region in abundance. According to a guesstimate by the World Bank, this area holds at least seven million barrels of oil and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.¹⁴ China needs greater oil and gas assets to fulfill its requirements of energy. China is examining oil reserves all over the world, for this drive it has to make friendship with dissimilar states in the Middle East and Africa. China will not hand over the chance to conquer the South China Sea because these oil reserves are closer to China. China's rising economy has further spawned its need for oil and gas resources. South China Sea reserves of energy will be more valuable for China.¹⁵ Strategically this is the most appropriate region for China because Chinese harbors are situated in this region. Sovereignty in the South China Sea will delineate the naval competence of China in the world.¹⁶ As freshly, China has cut off the communication lines of Nations like South Korea and Japan. South Korea and Japan are firm allies of the US. This is a straight threat to the US. In the future when China develops an economic giant then it will target US associates through the South China Sea.¹⁷ Dominance and pre-eminence over the South China Sea will also describe the

¹² Kaplan, Robert D. 2015. *The South China Sea is to China what the Greater Caribbean was to the US*. Edited by Ruyard Griffiths. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/munk-debates/robert-d-kaplan-the-south-china-sea-is-to-china-what-the-greater-caribbean-was-to-the-united-states/article25039063/>

¹³ Usmani, Dr M. 2015. "South China Sea conflict." *Jahangir World Times* 9: 28,29.

¹⁴ Usmani, Dr M. 2015. "South China Sea conflict." *Jahangir World Times* 9: 28,29.

¹⁵ Mughal, Tajwar Ali Taj. 2017. *Second Cold War*. Lahore: Graphic view Publishers.

¹⁶ Goldstein, Lyle J. 2019. *China Studies the Contours of the Gray Zone; Beijing Strategists Go to School on Russian Tactics in the Black Sea*. August 27. Accessed June 28, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-studies-contours-gray-zone-76476>

¹⁷ Goldstein, Lyle J. 2019. *China Studies the Contours of the Gray Zone; Beijing Strategists Go to School on Russian Tactics in the Black Sea*. August 27. Accessed June 28, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-studies-contours-gray-zone-76476>

expedition of China from the main power to a superpower. China's determination of hegemony compels her to claim more islets in the region.¹⁸

Expansion through 'Salami-Slicing' Strategy or Gray Zone Operations

Along with the economic expansion, China is also increasing its territorial and sea jurisdiction. For the expansion of resources and sea hydrocarbons, many artificial islands construction has been done since the beginning of the 21st century.¹⁹ Such construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea further heightened the prevailing antagonism in the region. Many policymakers observed that China has adopted the strategy of 'salami-slicing' for the acquisition of extra jurisdiction in the South China Sea.²⁰ 'Salami-slicing' strategy implies that China is doing series of incremental actions, mostly offensive, in such a manner where the status quo gradually changes in her favor while none of the action turns against Beijing interest or casus belli.²¹ Some observers also compare the Chinese strategy of expansion in the South China Sea to gray zone operations. This approach implies that "operations that reside in a gray zone between peace and war or creeping annexation or creeping invasion or as a talk and take strategy, meaning a strategy which China engages in (or draw out) negotiations while taking actions to gain control of contested areas".²²

Artificial Islands Building and New Bases Construction

The hegemonic competition requires sound economic and security spheres where nations can fulfill their interests in a smooth manner. In this regard, the Chinese need extraterritorial and sea jurisdiction to push back or keep away any possible threat or specifically the opposition states. Artificial island construction in the South China Sea came in the wake of the same struggle. China's island-building in the South China Sea i.e. aka land-reclamation and consequent base construction at positions where Spratly islands and Paracel islands can be controlled easily raised concerns among US policymakers.²³ Such developments in the South China Sea first appeared in

¹⁸ Mughal, Tajwar Ali Taj. 2017. *Second Cold War*. Lahore: Graphic view Publishers.

¹⁹ Gershaneck, Kerry K. 2018. *China's 'Political Warfare' Aims at South China Sea*. July 3. Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://asiatimes.com/2018/07/chinas-political-warfare-aims-at-south-china-sea/>

²⁰ Doornbos, Caitlin. 2019. *Freedom-of-Navigation Ops Will Not Dent Beijing's South China Sea Claims, Experts Say*. April 4. Accessed June 17, 2020. <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/freedom-of-navigation-ops-will-not-dent-beijing-s-south-china-sea-claims-experts-say-1.575609#:~:text=ANALYSIS-.Freedom%2Dof%2Dnavigation%20ops%20will%20not%20dent%20Beijing's%20South,China%20Sea%20claims%2C%20experts%>

²¹ Goldstein, Lyle J. 2019. *China Studies the Contours of the Gray Zone; Beijing Strategists Go to School on Russian Tactics in the Black Sea*. August 27. Accessed June 28, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-studies-contours-gray-zone-76476>.

²² Corr, Anders. 2017. *China's Take-And-Talk Strategy In The South China Sea*. March 29. Accessed April 8, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anderscorr/2017/03/29/chinas-take-and-talk-strategy-in-the-south-china-sea/?sh=127a0cb73216>

²³ Dolven, Ben. 2016. *Chinese Land Reclamation in the South China Sea: Implications and Policy Options*. CRS Report R44072.

December 2013 and were noticed internationally in May 2014. The dilemma got worse when an article showed the satellite photographs of before and after islands and reefs of China in the South China Sea which was completely changed due to artificial islands and base construction.²⁴

It has been reported that seven sites within the Spratly islands are occupied by China and their impressive base construction activities proceeding nowadays.²⁵ Among these sites, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, and Fiery Cross Reef are dominant ones because they are planned to be converted into active airfields which can directly challenge the US allies – Japan and the Philippines – in the South China Sea. Following the footsteps of China, Vietnam has been started constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea just to remain in business.²⁶

Scarborough Shoal, Second Thomas Shoal, and Senkaku Islands

In addition to extraterritorial and sea jurisdiction for economic purposes and artificial islands building for base construction, there are other Chinese activities in the South China Sea that have heightened the US concerns. The confrontation between the Philippines and the Chinese in 2012 at Scarborough in the South China Sea further aggravated the tension between the US and China. The purpose of Chinese interference was to “gain de facto control over access to the Shoal and its fishing grounds”.²⁷

Similarly, in November 2013, the Chinese announced the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) which also “includes airspace over the Senkaku islands”.²⁸ Moreover, China also continued frequent patrols at the Senkaku islands through Chinese Coast Guard Ships which is usually referred to as harassment operations.²⁹ Chinese also exerted pressure on the Philippine military at Second Thomas Shoal which derelict the later naval amphibious in the South China Sea.³⁰ Washington considered the Chinese move as an offensive aimed at alienating US allies in the

²⁴ Rapp-Hooper, Mira. 2015. *Before and After: The South China Sea Transformed*. February 18. Accessed June 12, 2020. <https://anti.csis.org/before-and-after-the-south-china-sea-transformed/>

²⁵ Dolven, Ben. 2016. *Chinese Land Reclamation in the South China Sea: Implications and Policy Options*. CRS Report R44072.

²⁶ Dolven, Ben. 2016. *Vietnam's Island Building: Double-Standard or Drop in the Bucket?* Washington, DC: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (CSIS).

²⁷ Elias, Ian E. Rinehart and Bart. 2015. *China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*. CRS Report R43894.

²⁸ Viray, Patricia Lourdes. 2019. *China's Blockade of Ayungin Shoal Resupply 'Objectionable'—Palace*. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/09/23/1954276/chinas-blockade-ayungin-shoal-resupply-objectionable-palace>

²⁹ Louordes, Patricia. 2019. *China Coast Guard Blocked Resupply Mission to Ayungin Shoal*. September 19. Accessed June 8, 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/09/19/1953204/china-coast-guard-blocked-resupply-mission-ayungin-shoal-dnd>

³⁰ Morallo, Audrey. 2018. *China's Navy, Coast Guard 'Harassed' Filipino Troops on Resupply Mission on Ayungin—Alejano*. Accessed July 8, 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/05/30/1820063/chinas-navy-coast-guard-harassed-filipino-troops-resupply-mission-ayungin-alejano>

region. However, the Chinese denied the US stance and compared the move to state security rather than a strategic engagement or someone else's business in the South China Sea.

Promoting Perception of US as 'Stir up Trouble'

Chinese preference in the South China Sea contains that dispute resolution should be based on a bilateral basis rather than a multilateral level. Through this strategy, China is resisting American involvement in South China Sea disputes. Chinese media produced such statements that depict images regarding South China Sea navigation operations as an interloper or outsider who is seeking or meddling to 'stir up trouble'.³¹ Moreover, Chinese media also depict Japanese involvement in the South China Sea disputes to alienate US allies. The purpose of alienating regional players from American bonds is to reach them at bilateral level discussions rather than engage them in a multilateral basis approach to dispute resolution.³² Once the allies and partners are sidelined from the US sphere, it could ensure maximum leverage to China in bilateral talks over maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Therefore, it is in the best interest of China to create a perception that US involvement in South China Sea disputes is controversial and can be reduced in the future.

The United States' Interests in the South China Sea

America is the solitary superpower on the earth and in space. The goal of the US is to sustain her prevalence all over the world at any price. The South China Sea with its natural resources, appeal, major ports, and trade centers induce the US to take a special interest in this region. Few major allies of the US like Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, are present in this region. The United States is anxious about the future of her associates in the region.³³ It is in the hope of balancing China with its allies (Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, and Taiwan) in the South China Sea. When China acquires hegemon status in this region then it would be very undesirable for the US. In the post-Cold War passé, the US is intensely worried about countering new challengers like China. In the South China Sea, the US pursues chances to hostage China.³⁴

The United States has compelling interests in the conservation of regional amity and stability in the South China Sea. Open and unhindered entrance, regional stability pertinent for both East

³¹ O'Rourke, Ronald. 2019. "Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and U.S. Force Design." Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 13.

³² Robles, Raissa. 2019. *Duterte's South China Sea U-Turn: Illegal Climbdown, or Clever Gambit for Oil?* September 11. Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3026795/dutertes-south-china-sea-u-turn-illegal-climbdown-or-clever>

³³ Almond, Roncevert Ganan. 2017. "The Extraterrestrial [Legal] Impact of the South China Sea Dispute." Washington, DC: The Diplomat, October 3.

³⁴ Edwards, Christian. 2018. *The South China Sea Is Fabled for Its Hidden Energy Reserves and China Wants to Block Outsiders Like the US from Finding Them.* Accessed July 5, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/south-china-sea-energy-reserves-china-wants-to-block-outsiders-2018-11#:~:text=The%20South%20China%20Sea%20is,the%20US%20from%20finding%20them&text=If%20successful%2C%20the%20move%20would,local%20powers%20from%20US%20support>

Asian and American prosperity, like a fight and powerful security rivalry would side-track scarce resources away from enhancement shrink trade by threatening the security of sea lanes and lessen cross border savings.³⁵ In this way, Chinese hegemony in the South China Sea can be dangerous for US attention in the region. The US does many businesses through this region and does enormous cooperation with many states in this region. Stresses in this region would be hazardous for the economy and the cooperation of the US. The US business in China may be set for a problematic time.³⁶ As in the past, the East China Sea has been a Sino-US hotspot. The quarrel of the Senkaku Islands between Japan and China had delivered many probabilities for the US involvement in the region. The joint security treaty of the US with Japan can force the US when Japan challenges the control of China in the South China Sea.³⁷ In light of the preceding discussion, Washington has the following main interests in the South China Sea.

US Security Paradigm in the South China Sea

American allies in the South China Sea – South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines – have created the basic lines of security architecture in the region to deal with China. Besides, Taiwan Strait which the United States has already gain security-related relations under the ‘Taiwan Relations Act’ can drag the confidence of other Southeast Asian nations bordering the South China Sea i.e. Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia.³⁸ However, still, in conflict with America, Chinese capabilities and intentions can keep the US forces away from the first island chain. Similarly, Chinese military bases in the South China Sea carry the ability to create bastions in conflict time.³⁹

Such developments could be vulnerable for the US interests in general and in wartime in particular. First, “China’s emerging sea-based strategic deterrent force of nuclear-powered ballistic submarines (SSBNs)” will delay the deployment of US forces in the South China Sea.⁴⁰ Second, it will complicate US military intervention in the case of the China and Taiwan crisis.⁴¹ Third, the

³⁵ Fravel, Taylor. 2012. "The US and China in Regional Security." *Berlin conference on Asian Security*. Berlin.

³⁶ Byrne, Brendan. 2015. *Value Walk*. OCT 28. Accessed June 7, 2020. www.valuewalk.com

³⁷ Bergenas, James G. Stavridis and Johan. 2017. "The Fishing Wars Are Coming." Washington, DC: Washington Post, September 13.

³⁸ Doornbos, Caitlin. 2019. *Freedom-of-Navigation Ops Will Not Dent Beijing’s South China Sea Claims, Experts Say*. April 4. Accessed June 17, 2020. <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/freedom-of-navigation-ops-will-not-dent-beijing-s-south-china-sea-claims-experts-say-1.575609#:~:text=ANALYSIS-Freedom%2Dof%2Dnavigation%20ops%20will%20not%20dent%20Beijing's%20South,China%20Sea%20claims%2C%20experts%20>

³⁹ Gershaneck, Kerry K. 2018. *China’s ‘Political Warfare’ Aims at South China Sea*. July 3. Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://asiatimes.com/2018/07/chinas-political-warfare-aims-at-south-china-sea/>

⁴⁰ Hoyler, Marshall. 2019. "The South China Sea Is Overrated, Assigning the South China Sea Geostrategic Importance Based on Its Popular Sea Lanes or Assumed Oil and Gas Reserves Is Suspect." Washington, DC: U.S. Naval Institute, June.

⁴¹ Jiao, Andreo Calozzo and Claire. 2019. *Philippines Prefers China Loans Over U.S. ‘Strategic Confusion’ in South China Sea*. May 20. Accessed June 5, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-20/china-has-more-to-offer-than-u-s-top-philippine-diplomat-says>

hegemonic competition in the region is both the US interest and vulnerability at the same time as well, since it is solely concerned with the security and influence of the Western Pacific.⁴² Fourth, the Chinese rising role in the South China Sea has also forged hurdles in the US interest of fulfilling defense treaty obligations with Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea. Lastly, the air defense and free flow of trade and commerce which can be used as an effective tool in crisis time can also be put under consideration.⁴³

Limiting the Use of Force' Phenomenon

The fundamental element of unipolar international order after World War Second under US hegemony is the no-use of force or coercion for dispute settlement. The dispute settling procedure, according to US international order should not follow the use of force at first place by any of the parties to conflict rather, table talks, mediation, or any other peace resolution agent should be given space. Currently, the US is facing the threat of such perception that in the future these 'might and right' rules may hinder the peace order in the South China Sea.

Freedom of Seas

Yet another feature of unipolar international order under American hegemony is treating the World's seas as international waters where trade, navigation, safety, and security should be ensured for the sake of larger interest (common interest). Chinese 9-dash line claim in the South China Sea, according to US official rhetoric has posed a significant threat to the freedom of navigation.⁴⁴

How the Chinese increasing influence in the South China Sea is a threat to freedom of navigation? The problem lies in the interpretation of the law of seas and consequent freedom of navigation. US Department of Defense defines freedom of navigation that it

"includes more than the mere freedom of commercial vessels to transit through international waterways, while not a defined term under international law, the Department uses freedom of the seas to mean all of the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace, including for military ships and aircraft, recognized under international law" (DODefense August 2015)⁴⁵

It is clear that the US interpretation of freedom of navigation allows the seas to be used in crisis time as well. On contrary, Chinese understanding of freedom of navigation presents a more restricted version of freedom of seas for the sake of better security, for instance, the Chinese

⁴² Parameswaran, Prashanth. 2019. "China's Creeping South China Sea Challenge in the Spotlight With New Facility." *Diplomat*, February 7.

⁴³ O'Rourke, Ronald. 2019. "Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and U.S. Force Design." Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 13.

⁴⁴ Pierson, Ana P. Santos and David. 2019. "Duterte Heeds to Pressure to Confront China as Midterms Approach in the Philippines." *Los Angeles Times*, April 15.

⁴⁵ DODefense. August 2015. *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense.

believe that allowing coastal states to regulate the defense or military activities of foreign states in exclusive economic zones (EEZs) can help in better security and freedom of navigation.⁴⁶

Thus, Chinese claims in the South China Sea directly contradict the US Interpretation of international law of seas. Moreover, such notions of freedom of navigation are weakening or limiting freedom of seas principles which has been developing for 400 years and is considering a legal tradition throughout history.⁴⁷ If the Chinese version of freedom of navigation got acceptance internationally, it could affect the US naval deployments and operation not only in the South China Sea but in other parts of the world seas as well. Consequently, US access to allies and war-torn regions will be decreased; naval operations in the Persian Gulf, Mediterranean Sea, and Western Pacific will be controversial; and US confidence in conducting combat operations or joint operations will receive a setback.⁴⁸

Hydrocarbons and Trade Routes

It is estimated that each year around \$3.4 trillion of international trade and shipping passes through the South China Sea. The South China Sea holds the major commercial shipping routes which connect Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. US Department of Defense stated that “the South China Sea plays an important role in security considerations across East Asia because Northeast Asia relies heavily on the flow oil and commerce through South China Sea shipping lanes, including more than 80 percent of the crude oil (flowing) to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan”.⁴⁹ Moreover, the South China Sea is also significant for gas and oil exploration. Any effort of exploration for oil and gas in the South China Sea could eventually affect the oil prices in the international market, consequently affecting the US role as a guarantor for the international market and the US dollar as an exchange tool.

⁴⁶ Goldstein, Lyle. 2018. *China Could Announce a ‘Total Exclusion Zone’ at Any Time*. October 25. Accessed July 17, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-could-announce-%E2%80%98total-exclusion-zone%E2%80%99-any-time-34297#:~:text=Beijing%20has%20been%20studying%20how.zone.%22%20Target%3A%20Taiwan.&text=%5Band%20would%20refrain%20from%20involvement.sung's%20fatefu>

⁴⁷ Goswami, Namrata. 2017. "Can China Be Taken Seriously on its ‘Word’ to Negotiate Disputed Territory?" *The Diplomat*, August 18.

⁴⁸ Santos, Eimor. 2019. "Experts Warn PH vs. Siding with China on UNCLOS Revision." Atlanta: CNN, September 6.

⁴⁹ Edwards, Christian. 2018. *The South China Sea Is Fabled for Its Hidden Energy Reserves and China Wants to Block Outsiders Like the US from Finding Them*. Accessed July 5, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/south-china-sea-energy-reserves-china-wants-to-block-outsiders-2018-11#:~:text=The%20South%20China%20Sea%20is,the%20US%20from%20finding%20them&text=If%20successful%2C%20the%20move%20would,local%20powers%20from%20US%20suppor>

Critical Analysis of US-China Relations in the South China Sea Hegemony under Clash: US Response

The US and China are colossal trade partners, this relationship is intended to augment the economy of both states in a relative manner. Enormous trade relations do not mean the nonappearance of any acrimony between these two countries. The US is doubtful about the growth of China.⁵⁰ The US is highly anxious about the hegemonic strategies of China in the South China Sea. The US is containing China both secretly and apparently. "The US navy sent P8 reconnaissance plane carrying navy and television camera crews to film Chinese island-building activity in the Spratly Islands, prompting warnings by a Chinese navy radio operator to leave the area. The warning went unheeded".⁵¹ China's ambition of Island making is a hegemonic goal of China, which is an intimidating activity for the superpower. To stop such progressive actions by a major power is a danger for the omnipotence of the US in the world. The US is distrustful that China will make more isles in this way.⁵²

Ashton Carter excluded China's exertions of Island making by calling it "out of step" with the agreement of the region. He whispered the US military aircraft and warships will remain operational in the area as adequate under international law.⁵³ It is a straight threat to China in the South China Sea. The US is not in a frame of mind to admit the Island making process of China. The US is menacing China directly because it has seen its omnipotence at stake in this region.⁵⁴ In the post-Cold war era, the US's goal has become to retain its pre-eminence in the world. China has been a hitch in the way of US determination in the Asia Pacific. Washington has worthy hopes about the forthcoming of their omnipotence in Asia.⁵⁵ For the 5 years, the Obama administration has transformed the South China Sea into a perilous flashpoint. It has bolstered the Philippines and Vietnam to press territorial claims against China.⁵⁶ The defense secretary of the US told Aljazeera that they shall carry on the principle of security authority in Asia-pacific in the future.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Hoyler, Marshall. 2019. "The South China Sea Is Overrated, Assigning the South China Sea Geostrategic Importance Based on Its Popular Sea Lanes or Assumed Oil and Gas Reserves Is Suspect." Washington, DC: U.S. Naval Institute, June.

⁵¹ Benner, Tom. 2015. *War of words heats up over South China Sea conflict*. May 31. Accessed June 8, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/31/war-of-words-heats-up-over-south-china-sea-conflict>.

⁵² Gershaneck, Kerry K. 2018. *China's 'Political Warfare' Aims at South China Sea*. July 3. Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://asiatimes.com/2018/07/chinas-political-warfare-aims-at-south-china-sea/>

⁵³ Carter, Aston. 2015. *US urges end to island-building in South China Sea*. May 28. Accessed June 07, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/5/28/us-urges-end-to-island-building-in-south-china-sea>

⁵⁴ Corr, Anders. 2017. *China's Take-And-Talk Strategy In The South China Sea*. March 29. Accessed April 8, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anderscorr/2017/03/29/chinas-take-and-talk-strategy-in-the-south-china-sea/?sh=127a0cb73216>

⁵⁵ Goswami, Namrata. 2017. "Can China Be Taken Seriously on its 'Word' to Negotiate Disputed Territory?" *The Diplomat*, August 18.

⁵⁶ Symond, Pytor. 2015. *Syria and the South China Sea: Two Flashpoints for World War*. Nov 27. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/11/27/pers-n27.html>

⁵⁷ Carter, Aston. 2015. *US urges end to island-building in South China Sea*. May 28. Accessed June 07, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/5/28/us-urges-end-to-island-building-in-south-china-sea>

The US is trying to creep up on China in the South China Sea in numerous ways. By exhibiting guided-missile demolisher, the US wants to halt the island-making process of China in the region. This is such a ploy, which the US used, most often in the first Cold war with USSR.⁵⁸ Chinese nonviolent progression has been the annoyance of the US and it has reached the edge to show hard power to stop the growing progress of China in different fragments of the world. “By using a guided-missile destroyer, rather than smaller vessels they are sending a strong message”.⁵⁹

The Obama government has focused on the South East Asian region during his official tenure to counterweight China in this region.⁶⁰ The US has many trustworthy allies in or near the South China Sea. Japan is a US associate in the North East, Australia, and New Zealand in South East Asia. Near the South China Sea Taiwan, Vietnam Philippines, and South Korea are the most allied allies of the US. These nations are aiding US interests here in this area.⁶¹ Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam had traditional acrimonies with PRC in history. The US has strengthened its armed relationships with the Philippines to expand its aptitude to shield its claims and to revenge Chinese coercion. ⁶²These countries are always looking for supervision and backing from the USA to stand China.

The US will not keep on mute when China turns out to be a hegemon in this region. When China assaults only one state in this region then the US will come to salvage that state swiftly because the US is solemnly anxious with the restraint of China in the region. Scarborough Shoal is proximate to the Philippines; it is 150 miles from the Philippines and 500miles away from China. ⁶³According to international law, the Philippines’s claim becomes lawful because it is nearby than PRC. The president of the Philippines Benigno Aquino said, “I think everybody would welcome a balance of power anywhere in the world”.⁶⁴

Paracel Islands are nearby to another US ally in this area and that is Vietnam. The Spratly Islands are nearby to Malaysia and Brunei. The US has good ties with Brunei and Malaysia, these states

⁵⁸ Rapp-Hooper, Mira. 2015. *Before and After: The South China Sea Transformed*. February 18. Accessed June 12, 2020. <https://amti.csis.org/before-and-after-the-south-china-sea-transformed/>

⁵⁹ Aljazeera. 2015. *US navy Spratly sail-by ‘threatens China sovereignty’*. october 27. Accessed July 06, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/us-navy-spratly-sail-by-threatens-china-sovereignty>

⁶⁰ Stansfield, Matt. 2014. "Containing China? The United States in the South Pacific Since 2011." University of Otago, december 3.

⁶¹ Viray, Patricia Lourdes. 2019. *China’s Blockade of Ayungin Shoal Resupply ‘Objectionable’—Palace*. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/09/23/1954276/chinas-blockade-ayungin-shoal-resupply-objectionable-palace>

⁶² Fravel, Taylor. 2012. "The US and China in Regional Security." *Berlin conferance on Asian Security*. Berlin.

⁶³ Morallo, Audrey. 2018. *China’s Navy, Coast Guard ‘Harassed’ Filipino Troops on Resupply Mission on Ayungin—Alejano*. Accessed July 8, 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/05/30/1820063/chinas-navy-coast-guard-harassed-filipino-troops-resupply-mission-ayungin-alejano>

⁶⁴ —. 2015. *US vows to repeat sail-by at China-claimed islands*. oct 28. Accessed June 6, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/28/us-vows-to-repeat-sail-by-at-china-claimed-islands>

can also seek out the supervision of the US in an emergency.⁶⁵US is also looking for backing from the ASEAN group of nations to decide the matter of the South China Sea. The US is the utmost aid donor to many states, which are near to the South China Sea. Vietnam is exasperating to entrap the US in its power play with China by getting US warships with resupply capabilities along its South China Sea seashore.⁶⁶American partners situated In the South China Sea are intensely in need of US interference in the area, they can force the US to interfere in the region.US is prepared to strengthen its allies in the region and it will upsurge her financial provisions to the states situated in this region and US warships will endure sailing in these regions, considering it, the international waters. Although these Isles are very far from China Beijing considers her claim genuine only in this region. A hazard of direct conflict between the US and China is noticeable in this scenario.⁶⁷Thus, it is an owing challenge for the US to counterpoise a highly forward-thinking China in the South China Sea.

The US is hardening its ties with states in the South Pacific with the determination to contain China in the region. The US has reinvigorated her tactical links with Singapore. Japan had intervened with three Chinese guard vessels in the East China Sea and it would respond determinedly to Chinese violations of Japan's separate claims to the Senkaku Islands.⁶⁸Japan is a steadfast US ally and demonstrating her compliance to the US by responding against China in such a time when the strains in the South China Sea are at the topmost point.⁶⁹On 7th December 2015 US positioned Poseidon P-8 spy plane in Singapore for the first time. This act took place in such a situation when the South China Sea dispute is at its utmost. Such an armed action is seen by China as an effort to contain it.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Erickson, Andrew S. 2019. "Maritime Numbers Game, Understanding and Responding to China's Three Sea Forces." *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*.

⁶⁶ Kaplan, Robert D. 2015. *The South Chona Sea is to China what the Greater Caribbean was to the US*. Edited by Rudyard Griffiths. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/munk-debates/robert-d-kaplan-the-south-china-sea-is-to-china-what-the-greater-caribbean-was-to-the-united-states/article25039063/>

⁶⁷ Doornbos, Caitlin. 2019. *Freedom-of-Navigation Ops Will Not Dent Beijing's South China Sea Claims, Experts Say*. April 4. Accessed June 17, 2020. [https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/freedom-of-navigation-ops-will-not-dent-beijing-s-south-china-sea-claims-experts-say-1.575609#:~:text=ANALYSIS-Freedom%2Dof%2Dnavigation%20ops%20will%20not%20dent%20Beijing's%20South,China%20Sea%20claims%2C%20experts%](https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/freedom-of-navigation-ops-will-not-dent-beijing-s-south-china-sea-claims-experts-say-1.575609#:~:text=ANALYSIS-Freedom%2Dof%2Dnavigation%20ops%20will%20not%20dent%20Beijing's%20South,China%20Sea%20claims%2C%20experts%20)

⁶⁸ Shim, Elizabeth. 2015. *Japan Jions US in opposing China's South China Sea Claims*. nov 23. Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2015/11/23/Japan-joins-US-in-opposing-Chinas-South-China-Sea-claims/9451448295773/

⁶⁹ Holmes, James. 2019. *Are Freedom of Navigation Operations in East Asia Enough?* February 23. Accessed June 3, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/are-freedom-navigation-operations-east-asia-enough-45257#:~:text=Answer%3A%20freedom%2Dof%2Dnavigation,trade%20and%20commerce%20it%20und erwrites>

⁷⁰ Brunnstrom, David. 2015. *US deploys Poseidon P-8 spy plane in Singapore for first time*. December 08. Accessed June 3, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-singapore-southchinasea-idUSKBN0TQ2K720151208>

Great thinkers like Robert D Kaplan uphold the opinion that China has become a serious challenge for the hegemony of the US in many regions. He contemplates the South China Sea as an important region for China to obtain a superior rank in the world.⁷¹ He further upheld that the genuine competition for the Pentagon is reducing down China's alteration into the leading military power in South Asia.⁷² On 18 November 2015, Obama called to stop the militarization of unresolved Isles in the South China Sea during a high-level get-together with pacific leaders in Manila.⁷³ Different socialists see US schemes gloomily and they consider the US a majestic power which is in contrast to socialist countries. Socialists affirm that the US's fight with Russia in Syria and Beijing in the South China Sea are segments of an all-encompassing method aimed at preserving an overruling position across the vast region.⁷⁴

In the future, the South China Sea will be a place where the US will inspect its strengths time in again. It will face the toughest resistance from the side of China.⁷⁵ The Defense Secretary of the US acknowledged that sixty percent of the US's warships encompassing six aircraft-carrier groups would be located in the Asia-Pacific playhouse by 2020 to device the so-called "rebalance to the Asia-Pacific" Strategy.⁷⁶

Chinese Rejoinder

The US intrigues in the South China Sea constrained China to give severe clarifications about the US. Chinese Foreign ministry branded the US a country, which performs double standards. China has strongly forbidden the circumnavigating of navy warships of the US close to its synthetic isles in the South China Sea, considering it a "threat to China's sovereignty".⁷⁷ Although the new Cold War, which is being fought between the US and Beijing, was not observable in the post-Cold War scenario it has been clear in the Dispute of the South China Sea. China has been busy firming up its defense competence in the area and giving signals that it will take steps to challenge US armed forces in the area.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Poling, Zack Cooper and Gregory. 2019. "America's Freedom of Navigation Operations Are Lost at Sea, Far Wider Measures Are Needed to Challenge Beijing's Maritime Aggression." Foreign Policy, January 8.

⁷² Kaplan, Robert D. 2015. *The South China Sea is to China what the Greater Caribbean was to the US*. Edited by Rudyard Griffiths. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/munk-debates/robert-d-kaplan-the-south-china-sea-is-to-china-what-the-greater-caribbean-was-to-the-united-states/article25039063/>.

⁷³ Gertz, Bill. 2015. *War of Words Over South China Sea, Militarization heats Up*. November 30. Accessed June 6, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/31/war-of-words-heats-up-over-south-china-sea-conflict>

⁷⁴ Symond, Pytor. 2015. *Syria and the South China Sea: Two Flashpoints for World War*. Nov 27. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/11/27/pers-n27.html>

⁷⁵ Robles, Raissa. 2019. *Duterte's South China Sea U-Turn: Illegal Climbdown, or Clever Gambit for Oil?* September 11. Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3026795/dutertes-south-china-sea-u-turn-illegal-climbdown-or-clever>

⁷⁶ Economist, The. 2012. "The China Syndrome." *The Economist* www.economist.com

⁷⁷ Aljazeera. 2015. *US navy Spratly sail-by 'threatens China sovereignty'*. October 27. Accessed July 06, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/us-navy-spratly-sail-by-threatens-china-sovereignty>

⁷⁸ Gertz, Bill. 2015. *War of Words Over South China Sea, Militarization heats Up*. November 30. Accessed June 6, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/31/war-of-words-heats-up-over-south-china-sea-conflict>

China is not at a point to take dictation from any superpower together with the US. Its martial might and its economic progression have made it a hegemon in Asia mainly in the South China Sea. The people of China can make their own decisions about the events. They contemplate it no one's right to express them about their engagements.⁷⁹ China does not admit unipolarity when it performs in contrast to the determination of Beijing. In the matter of the South China Sea, China gives the impression of ready to abandon the dictations of the US in a unipolar world.⁸⁰

In reaction to the P8 reconnaissance of the US, China has lost her confidence in the US and cautioned the US to spot its mistakes. Nevertheless, obstinately the US contemplates her right to sail in the international waters according to international law. For the US, 9 Dash Line belongs to the international waters and synthetic islets have no economic zones.⁸¹ China extremely insisted on the US side to accurately grip China's solemn demonstrations, immediately correct its blunders. And not take any perilous or incendiary acts that threaten China's sovereignty and security interests.⁸²

China has re-joined that they will also form necessary defense amenities on some Isles and reefs.⁸³ Beijing is ready to fight the US in the South China Sea. Chinese are not in a state to find the middle ground with the US in the area when the US challenges to monitor the islets making the process of China. The term second Cold War will be resonated in the circles of social sciences particularly in the domains of experts of international politics when a direct clash of Sino-US happens due to South China Sea disputes.⁸⁴ Chinese military and defense are ready to answer any kind of interference of the US in their demanded area predominantly in its Island making activities. Chinese foreign ministry told Aljazeera news that they are going to monitor the seas and airspaces and they are ready to take all obligatory initiatives according to the requirements.⁸⁵

Although the two economic behemoths of the world like China and the US are huge business partners they are displaying different notions on the matter of the South China Sea, these states have vanished confidence in each other.⁸⁶ This loss of dependency can be risky for the business

⁷⁹ —. 2015. *US urges end to island-building in South China Sea*. may 28. Accessed June 6, 2020.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/5/28/us-urges-end-to-island-building-in-south-china-sea>

⁸⁰ Mughal, Tajwar Ali Taj. 2017. *Second Cold War*. Lahore: Graphic view Publishers.

⁸¹ Heydarian, Richard. 2019. *How Rodrigo Duterte's Latest Beijing Visit Marks a Crossroads for China, the Philippines and Asia*. September 1. Accessed May 4, 2020.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3025170/how-rodrigo-dutertes-latest-beijing-visit-marks-crossroads>

⁸² Aljazeera. 2015. *US navy Spratly sail-by 'threatens China sovereignty'*. october 27. Accessed July 06, 2020.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/us-navy-spratly-sail-by-threatens-china-sovereignty>

⁸³ Gertz, Bill. 2015. *War of Words Over South China Sea, Militarization heats Up*. November 30. Accessed June 6, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/31/war-of-words-heats-up-over-south-china-sea-conflict>

⁸⁴ Jiao, Andreo Calonzo and Claire. 2019. *Philippines Prefers China Loans Over U.S. 'Strategic Confusion' in South China Sea*. May 20. Accessed June 5, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-20/china-has-more-to-offer-than-u-s-top-philippine-diplomat-says>

⁸⁵ Aljazeera. 2015. *US navy Spratly sail-by 'threatens China sovereignty'*. october 27. Accessed July 06, 2020.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/us-navy-spratly-sail-by-threatens-china-sovereignty>

⁸⁶ Pierson, Ana P. Santos and David. 2019. "Duterte Heeds to Pressure to Confront China as Midterms Approach in the Philippines." Los Angeles Times, April 15.

relationships of both these great powers of the world. China further strained that the US actions in the South China Sea had “damaged trust” and China will act on “all necessary measures” to sustain her domestic security.⁸⁷ As Mearsheimer correctly specified that a much more powerful China can also be likely to try to drive the US out of the Asia Pacific area. As in the past US pushed the European great powers out of the Western hemisphere in the nineteenth century. He deduces that China will come up with its particular account of Monroe dogma as majestic Japan did in 1930.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Dawn. 2015. "US warship sails close to islands being built by China." Islamabad, oct 28.

⁸⁸ Mearsheimer, John J. 2006. "China's Unpeaceful Rise." *Current History* 105 (690): 160-162.