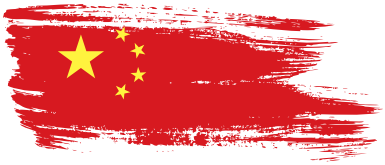

2020–21 WILSON CHINA FELLOWSHIP

Chinese Intentions in the South China Sea

Oriana Skylar Mastro is a 2020 Wilson China Fellow, a Center Fellow at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Wilson Center

Wilson China Fellowship

Abstract

What are China's intentions in the South China Sea? In this article I present an analytical framework for understanding intentions based on two components: 1) distinguishing between intentions about the process and those about the outcome and 2) incorporating information from discourse, behavior, and capabilities. Through applying the framework, I argue that China wants to establish de facto control over the South China Sea, meaning sovereignty over the disputed islands and the ability to dictate the rules of behavior in the surrounding waters. These intentions are detrimental to U.S. and allied interests. I conclude with a list of recommended measures the United States can take to prevent Beijing from incrementally advancing its control over the South China Sea.

Policy Recommendations:

- The United States should expand and increase the tempo of its military operations in the SCS to show that China has not dissuaded the United States by increasing the risk to U.S. forces.

- In the military realm, the United States should prioritize coalition building to ensure a free and open South China Sea.

- The United States should specify that its U.S. alliance commitments extend to protection of countries' rights within their EEZs.

- To further increase costs to China, the United States could warn Beijing that it may reconsider its neutral position on the sovereignty of the South China Sea disputed islands to support claimants with less expansive and restrictive EEZ claims unless China moderates its EEZ claims and agrees to international law positions on maritime rights.

- The United States should respond immediately to each aggressive act China takes in these waters, *regardless of its target*. Moreover, the United States should be sure to respond even when a treaty ally is not involved—this would stress that the United States is serious about

protecting international norms, regardless of who the transgressors are and what the violation is.

- When China commits an act of aggression or coercion, the Chinese assets or organizations involved should not determine the U.S. response. Instead, the United States should feel free to respond to paramilitary actors as it would to military actors.

- To reconstitute its deterrent, the United States should seek military access to new partner facilities in the SCS. The United States should also improve the quality of other claimants' maritime reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities and build their defensive capabilities.

- Lastly, the United States should spearhead and prioritize a diplomatic solution to the South China Sea disputes, with or without China. Countries in the region disagree with China's interpretation of international law. If the rest of the claimants agree about the islands' sovereignty and the rights granted by those islands and ask the international community to help enforce the agreement, China will have difficulty pushing its claims and pressuring states unilaterally to concede to its demands. If Beijing refuses to follow these rules, Washington should form a coalition to restrict China's access to technology and related information. Washington should even threaten to expel Beijing from the relevant international regimes.

What are China's intentions in the South China Sea (SCS)? Some analysts see Chinese motivations as purely economic—eighty percent of China's crude oil imports pass through the SCS, and there are substantial oil and natural gas reserves in the seabed.[1] In this interpretation, Beijing is simply looking to secure its energy supplies and protect commercial trade routed through the SCS.[2] Others believe Chinese intentions to be more nefarious and expansive; specifically, China is building a "great wall of sand" to keep foreign powers,[3] namely the United States, out. Here, regime legitimacy may mandate that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) exercise *complete* control over the SCS, requiring countries to obtain Chinese permission to conduct any activities there.[4]

Understanding China's desired end state in the SCS and the way it plans to achieve its aims means touching upon some of the major questions regarding the future of regional security, the role of the United States in the region, and U.S.-China great power competition. Territorial disputes are by far the number one cause of interstate conflict.[5] In the SCS, there are several disputes over offshore islands and overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) involving China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. China has resorted to force twice against Vietnam in the Paracel Islands and seized Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines in 2012 through military coercion.

Even though the United States is not a party to the territorial disputes, Chinese intentions in the SCS concern Washington from three perspectives. First, many U.S. allies have interests in the SCS. China's claims involve the Philippines, a U.S. treaty ally, and thus the U.S. may become involved in a military conflict to defend the Philippines' claims. The SCS also has significant strategic value for Northeast Asia countries, such as U.S. allies South Korea and Japan, as most commerce and oil flows pass through the SCS shipping lanes. These waters also contain significant oil and gas reserves, along with fisheries. The SCS is similarly crucial for Australia because almost a third of its trade passes through the SCS.[6] Second, China is challenging the traditional interpretation of the international legal maritime regime; the United States, as the established hegemon, is interested in upholding international law, norms, and order. U.S. and Chinese military assets often come into contact with one another as each side tries to exercise and interpret its rights. Third, as the guarantor

of regional peace, the United States wants the disputants to handle the territorial disputes in the SCS in peaceful, non-coercive ways. Even without a conflict, China's effective dominion guarantees the power to carry out a series of activities, including economic exploitation and coercion, air defense identification and maritime exclusion zones, military projection, and the extension of political influence further into the West Pacific. These potential strategies threaten to result in a reconfiguration of the regional security architecture that is unfavorable to the United States and its allies and partners.

This article aims to provide insight into Chinese ambitions in the SCS. I begin by summarizing my analytical framework for understanding intentions, which distinguishes between intentions about the process and those about the outcome and incorporates information from discourse, behavior, and capabilities. This kind of analysis leads to nuanced and specific conclusions about Chinese intentions.

I then argue that China wants to establish de facto control over the SCS, which means it wants to gain sovereignty over the disputed islands and to dictate the rules of behavior in the surrounding waters. These intentions are detrimental to U.S. and allied interests, mostly because of Beijing's ultimate goal, or its outcome intentions; China's process intentions are only problematic insofar as they are effective and efficient. Specifically, China is currently relying mainly on economic, political, and indirect military means to pursue this goal, perhaps because its military capabilities fall short. There are early signs that the military's role in establishing Chinese control will increase soon. The greatest uncertainty revolves around 1) the risks China is willing to run to achieve its goals; 2) whether China will be willing to settle for less if its pursuit of de facto control risks war with the United States; and 3) whether its process intentions will change once Beijing has more viable military options.

A Framework for Understanding China's Intentions

Why is it important to decipher intentions? For scholars, state intentions play a pivotal role in many international relations paradigms. For example, differing assumptions about state intentions and the ability to decipher them constitute the fundamental difference between offensive and defensive realism;[7] the question of whether exogenous factors such as international institutions or norms and

ideas can shape what a country wants is central to the theoretical frameworks of liberalism and constructivism.[8] Intentions play a particularly central role in international relations theories about rising powers and great power competition, which most agree currently characterize U.S.-China relations.[9] But looking at relative power alone is insufficient to understand whether power transitions will lead to war. Instead, it is Beijing's intentions that largely determine the degree of threat that China's rise may pose to the United States and its allies.[10]

To understand Chinese intentions in the SCS, I take a unique approach. First, I evaluate processes and objectives separately. I define process intentions by the methods preferred and the factors that influence how a country thinks it is best to achieve its goals. In other words, how is China attempting to achieving its maritime goals and why? Outcome intentions, in contrast, refer to "what one wants to bring about, accomplish or attain."[11]

The distinction between outcome and process is analytically useful because a country may have revisionist outcome intentions but pursue its goals within the confines of acceptable international behavior. For example, a country may want to change the territorial status quo but attempt to do so through legitimate means, as Kosovo did when it declared its independence in 2008.[12] Or a country may have a legitimate objective, such as economic growth, but pursue it through problematic means, like occupying a resource-rich country or enacting trade barriers in violation of its international commitments. The disaggregation of the intentions also facilitates more effective strategic responses by allowing for more granular detail in prioritization and feasibility assessments.

Second, I transparently triangulate the three major sources of information about Chinese intensions: China's national discourse, its behavior, and the military capabilities it is building. When these sources contradict each other, I evaluate the potential sources of bias and discuss why I weighed some pieces of information more than others or what certain sources cannot tell us with a high degree of confidence.

Lastly, a caveat. Some believe that intentions are unknowable and thus are eager to dismiss this whole exercise as futile. I disagree with this viewpoint—we can learn certain things about intentions with varying degrees of confidence. Because states deliberately implement plans to pursue specific objectives, it is theoretically possible to decipher current ambitions. I focus on current ambitions, which refer to what the leadership *has already decided* it wants to achieve

in the future. Future ambitions are important, but given limited resources, the United States needs to address China's current ambitions first and foremost.

Moreover, there is path dependency to ambition. Rising powers have likely taken into account projections of future power when devising current ambitions. If China does change its maritime ambitions, the direction and nature of the change will reflect the aspects of the current intentions that have produced results, any negative consequences, and any socially and politically viable replacement ideas for intentions that have not produced results.[13]

Chinese Intentions in the SCS

The rest of this contribution will evaluate Chinese discourse, behavior, and capabilities in the SCS to clarify China's ultimate goals in the SCS and show how its leadership is currently attempting to achieve those goals.

Chinese Discourse about the South China Sea

China scholars often use Chinese sources to gather information about Chinese military strategy, doctrine, and intentions. Specifically, China specialists look to two categories of information: 1) official documents and speeches made by senior CCP officials and 2) discussions among Chinese academics and think tank experts who may be informed about, or in some cases may even influence, internal discussions.[14] The difficulty is that not all of this national discourse is equally informative. Leaders have incentives to misrepresent their positions; authors may have ulterior motives; and some voices may not represent the government's views because they lack authority or influence, or because they are in the minority.

Considering the potential bias of national discourse, I focus on three factors when evaluating what China says about the SCS. First, the content of the discourse matters. If the discourse conveys information that a rising power should be trying to misrepresent but is not, this is a credible indication of intentions. For example, if Chinese leaders convey problematic intentions—such as the intention to push the United States out of the region and break apart its alliance system—this is likely an honest indication of outcome intentions. Another aspect of content is consistency. Discourse helps to identify the range of the debate on an issue. Understanding the authority of sources only

becomes important when there are different messages; when there is a consistent position across different types of documentary evidence, the credibility of the content increases.

Second, the specificity of the content plays a role. If a leader can be held accountable for not following through on a threat or promise, less-specific statements mean that leaders have more room to claim they have followed through with policy substitution.[15] If a leader lays out signs of progress towards fulfilling intentions and states timelines for reaching those goals, and if such progress is subsequently observable, the statements have greater credibility. The degree of censorship also affects the evaluation of the content of discourse. In more repressive societies, views that are openly discussed or published (without retribution) can be considered to have received a degree of leadership approval.

Third, the statements of different people within the system need to be weighed differently depending on the speakers' decision making and implementation power, degree of accountability,[16] and personal reputations for honesty.[17]

Content. There is consistency across official and unofficial sources about China's position on the SCS. In 2016, the State Council issued a White Paper on territorial disputes in the SCS between China and the Philippines. The White Paper declares the SCS to be China's "inherent territory (固有领土)."[18] Another phrase China always uses is "historically been part of China's territory (自古以来就是中国领土)." China uses this phrase for the SCS, the East China Sea (ECS), Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. China often uses the "SCS" and "islands in the SCS (南海诸岛)" interchangeably. The White Paper cites historical records to argue that Chinese people have historically used and developed the SCS area for economic activities and that the Chinese government has historically governed the region peacefully and effectively.[19] The 2019 National Defense White Paper reiterates the claim that the SCS is China's "inherent territory" and declares that "defending national sovereignty, security, and development interest" is the fundamental goal of China's national defense in the new era.[20]

Xi Jinping stated in his 2015 *Reuters* interview that the SCS has "historically been part of China's territory (自古以来就是中国领土)" and that any activity China conducts in the region is justified by the need to defend China's

territorial sovereignty.[21] Xi has also repeatedly vowed that China will firmly defend its sovereignty and relevant rights in the SCS both during bilateral meetings and at multilateral summits.[22] I have not found one source—official or unofficial—that questions China's right to sovereignty over these waters. It is also notable that Chinese sovereignty claims to the SCS are not what the United States and other regional actors want to hear; if anything, China has an incentive to adjust its rhetoric to moderate its claims. This lends credibility to the assessment that China intends to establish its sovereignty over the SCS.

Specificity. Chinese sources not only clearly state that China's ultimate objective is sovereignty over the SCS, but also are very specific in how they justify these outcome intentions.

First, China claims some of the SCS as internal waters, which means that in its view, countries do not even have the right to peaceful transit. Second, China claims a 12 nautical mile (NM) territorial sea from the Paracel baseline, not from the individual islands, and in the Spratlys from many features that under international law are not awarded this right, like the artificial islands. Lastly, China claims 200 NM from the end of the territorial sea as its EEZ, where it claims to have the right to regulate military activity.[23]

Through these three positions alone, China lays claim to approximately 80 percent of the SCS. China uses the nine-dash line to cover the remaining territory and provide redundancy to its other claims by claiming "historic waters"; that is, it claims to have controlled this maritime environment historically, a view that has no basis in international law.

Leaders' positions. Lastly, I analyze all public speeches made by members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China. Both of the Politburos I studied were led by Xi Jinping, and each had 25 members. Since some members served in both, this yields speeches by 39 unique individuals.[24] Chinese leaders on average used more cooperative discourse in their public statements about the SCS, which suggests a willingness to compromise with other claimants, especially during the first year of each new Party Congress, in 2013 and 2018. However, in the Chinese system, one person's discourse matters than all the others: Xi Jinping. The content of his speeches about the South China Sea is mainly confrontational; his statements account for 42.7 percent of all the competitive themes mentioned even though he is only one of 39 unique leaders during this period.

Conclusions. An analysis of Chinese discourse on the SCS suggests that China is working towards establishing sovereignty over the SCS. The SCS is a top priority for the CCP because it is tied to Chinese security, prosperity, and Party legitimacy—and China has a dedicated plan to achieve its goals. China's main goal is getting other countries to accept its sovereignty over the SCS. Its behavior, and specifically its harassment of regional countries and its largely rhetorical responses to the United States, combined with the portrayal of the United States as an outsider, suggests that China is focusing on convincing regional actors to concede to China's position, which can then be used as leverage to delegitimize U.S. attempts to hold out. This strategy plays out in more detail in Chinese behavior and capabilities—but because it has been underway during the U.S. Pivot to Asia and now the Indo-Pacific strategy, we can determine that Chinese leaders believe it to have high feasibility.

There are a few important things that discourse cannot tell us. First, does China need only de facto sovereignty over the SCS, or will it demand de jure sovereignty? In other words, will Beijing be happy enough if states respect China's proclaimed maritime rights in practice, or do they need to officially and legally concede that the SCS is Chinese territory? Right now, there is stronger support for the former, but the latter cannot be ruled as a future intention. If China did have de facto or de jure control, based on the discourse, we can be certain it would not allow military operations in these waters unless they were conducted jointly with the Chinese military. Its intentions about controlling commercial resources are less clear, as China has said it has no intention to disrupt commerce. Again, this claim is credible in peacetime; China benefits more than any other country from commercial transit through these waters. However, if the United States conceded the first island chain even in practice, China would have great economic coercion power against countries in the region, which—given its history—it would likely use on an ad hoc basis. China might also allow countries to engage in fishing and oil exploration in the SCS with Chinese permission, but only on a limited basis and likely in exchange for their compliance on other issues.

Additionally, the lack of specificity about a timeline and indicators of success in national discourse suggests that the Chinese government is relatively risk-averse in pursuing its intentions. Indeed, Chinese leaders have vowed to

protect Chinese sovereignty, but they have failed to clearly articulate what they are claiming so that there are off-ramps if states fail to comply. However, if any seemingly permanent changes to the status quo make its goals less feasible, China will respond more forcefully. Because China believes that the SCS largely belongs to it, it focuses on avoiding losses, which makes it relatively risk-acceptant in combatting any aggression.

National discourse also reveals little about how China hopes to accomplish its goals. Chinese statements articulate both that China is willing to use force and that Beijing will rely on peaceful means in resolving its SCS disputes. In the 2016 White Paper on resolving territorial disputes with the Philippines in the SCS and the 2019 National Defense White Paper, China makes clear its official position that it "adheres to the position of settling disputes through negotiation and consultation and managing differences through rules and mechanisms."[25] China also emphasizes that its military development and deployments in the region are defensive in nature, as China wishes to maintain peace and stability with regional countries.[26] At the same time, China never relinquishes its willingness to use force to settle disputes. The 2019 National Defense White Paper highlights defending China's sovereignty and territorial integrity as the primary goal of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), though the rhetoric on defending the SCS is much less assertive than the rhetoric regarding reunification with Taiwan.[27] Xi has made strong statements pledging that China will not allow an inch of Chinese territory to be taken away.[28]

It is difficult to assess which position is more trustworthy because there are reasons to suspect bias in both. On the one hand, China has an incentive to reassure countries that it will not pursue its goals through violent means. China has long sought to pursue confidence-building measures with regional countries to reduce mistrust between China and ASEAN states.[29] It also identifies the United States which China calls an "extra-regional power," as the source of conflicts and tension in the region.[30] On the other hand, China wants to signal its resolve to other SCS claimants and the United States, lest these countries try to make advances at China's expense.[31] In short, information from discourse alone is insufficient to resolve some of these debates. Thus, we turn to an analysis of Chinese behavior and military capabilities for additional data on *how* China plans to achieve its goal of sovereignty over the SCS.

Chinese Behavior in the South China Sea

While discourse provides insights into what China hopes to achieve, it reveals little about how China hopes to achieve those goals. Chinese behavior and capabilities are better positioned to provide insights into this issue. Here I focus on one aspect of process intentions: the role of military force. Specifically, to what degree is China relying on military power versus other tools of power to promote its interests in a particular issue area?

A review of Chinese activities with respect to the SCS suggests that China relies mainly on diplomatic, economic, and legal tools of persuasion and coercion—specifically lawfare, economic coercion, and grey zone activities. However, there are indications that China may become more reliant on traditional uses of military power in the near future.

Lawfare and economic coercion. A key part of China's process intentions over the past decade has been its reliance on legal maneuvers to convince mainly Southeast Asian countries to concede to China's sovereignty claims. China is proactively pushing for a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the SCS to be signed with ASEAN member states.[32] Throughout these negotiations, Beijing has sought to exclude outside countries, such as the United States, from the process.[33] Many of China's desired provisions are also contentious. For example, China has been pushing for certain measures that increase its bargaining power vis-à-vis other claimants, such as prohibiting signatories from giving military access or engaging in military exercises with non-signatories, like the United States.[34] China has also pushed for a provision that energy exploitation in the SCS cannot be carried out by foreign companies.

While trying to reshape the legal environment, China has also rejected aspects of the current legal order that do not support its claims, such as the 2016 UNCLOS Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling in favor of the Philippines on a number of complaints.[35] Unsurprisingly, China has been non-compliant with most of the Arbitration findings. Many of these violations are related to Beijing's refusal to recognize the ruling on what constitutes the Philippines' EEZ—for example, China's continued presence on an artificial island at Mischief Reef and efforts to prevent Filipino fishermen from fishing around Scarborough Shoal.[36]

Beijing also employs a host of economic tools to consolidate its influence in the South China Sea, often using coercion against more advanced

countries and cooperative economic policy for developing nations.[37] When the Philippines passed a law in 2009 declaring its territory to be in line with UNCLOS guidelines—disputing China's territorial claims over Huangyan Island and the Nansha Islands—Chinese imports of Philippine goods went down by 46 percent that year.[38] More recently, Beijing has signed a series of infrastructure development deals with Manila worth billions of dollars. With the influx of Chinese loans, the Philippines' foreign policy has shifted towards China and away from the United States. In a 2019 statement questioning the Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and the Philippines, Filipino Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said that the Philippines "is more likely to be involved in a shooting war" with an increased U.S. naval presence in the region.[39]

Grey Zone Activities. One of the biggest complaints among other claimants is that China's tends to engage in grey zone activities in the SCS. This term is used to describe coercive and threatening activities that stay below the threshold of armed conflict to secure gains while avoiding provoking military responses by others.[40] In the SCS, these tactics include China's building of artificial islands, the use of law enforcement and maritime militia vessels in an unprofessional and escalatory manner to deter or deny other countries' use of living and nonliving resources in the waters, and economic coercion and political subversion.[41] In two separate incidents that took place in April and July, respectively, the Chinese Coast Guard sank[42] and rammed[43] Vietnamese fishing vessels operating near the Paracel Islands.[44] Similarly, in April, the Chinese marine survey vessel the *Haiyang Dizhi* 8, with support from China's navy and coast guard, harassed a Malaysian oil exploration project within Malaysia's exclusive economic zone.[45]

Traditional Military Activities. China's traditional military activities have evolved from defensive engagement to greater military presence and operations in the SCS. Since 2016, Chinese traditional military activities in the SCS have increased in frequency, complexity, and aggressiveness.[46] For example, in 2018, China conducted an unprecedented naval exercise in the SCS involving over 40 ships.[47] Last year, there was an increase in both the quantity and quality of military exercises—such as an early warning reconnaissance drill that was much longer and more offensive than previous exercises.[48] China's artificial island bases have improved power projection capabilities by allowing

hundreds of militia and coast guard ships to patrol the South China Sea for months without returning to the mainland.

Conclusions. All these activities corroborated the conclusion based on discourse—China intends to establish de facto control over a majority of the SCS but is relatively risk-averse in choosing how to do so. China has preferred to rely on economic, legal, and diplomatic tools to consolidate its control.[49] When China does use more risky, forceful actions, they tend to be directed at other regional claimants over which China has clear escalation dominance using militia and law enforcement.[50] It is one thing for China to accomplish its goals at a relatively low cost below the threshold of conflict or to risk a small skirmish with another regional actor; it is quite another to be willing to fight a major war with the United States. Behavior over the past eight months adds confidence to this assessment. From April through September, China's military engaged in 16 different military maneuvers, including exercises, weapons testing, and deployments to the SCS islands.[51]

The nature and timing of these exercises suggest that the main target audience is the United States. First, many of these exercises were conducted immediately after a U.S. military action. Second, the capabilities China is exercising and displaying are the most relevant ones for a contingency against the United States in the SCS: anti-surface warfare and an air campaign over the disputed islands.[52] In other words, Chinese behavior suggests that China is attempting to make slow and steady progress towards control of the SCS, relying on lawfare and grey zone activities to compel acquiescence from other regional players and on traditional displays of military force to convince the United States to stay out of the issue.

But the PLA has been cautious in its direct interactions with the U.S. military. China has not engaged in risky brinksmanship with U.S. platforms, and direct encounters have tended to be safe and professional. Instead, the PLA is using its military power indirectly to signal the capability to impose costs on the United States if war were to break out. It seems that the need to enhance deterrence vis-à-vis the U.S. has become the priority, even at the expense of revealing capabilities or exacerbating tensions with other claimants. In the past, China would choose the timing and nature of deployments and exercises to downplay their operational significance and promote the narrative that China's posture was defensive;[53] more often than not, public statements would

not even accompany the event. But now, the military is keen to demonstrate its offensive capabilities to the United States.

Chinese Military Capabilities in the South China Sea

This last section assesses what China's force posture, equipment and weapons, and military exercises reveal about Chinese intentions in the SCS.

Chinese Coast Guard and law enforcement capabilities. In 2013, numerous organizational changes were made to the Chinese force posture. First, the Coast Guard was formed from a number of law enforcement agencies (China Marine Surveillance, Fisheries Law Enforcement, Maritime Police, and Anti-smuggling Police) and tasked with protecting Chinese rights as it defines them in the SCS.[54] Three regional branches (north, east, and south) have eleven contingents that each contain lower-level detachments. In a 2018 reorganization, the Coast Guard was placed under the People's Armed Police, which was officially elevated to an armed branch directly under the Central Military Commission through a 2020 law.[55] Thus, the Coast Guard is now part of China's armed forces and is in the process of hiring officers. The Coast Guard currently has over 120 ships displacing more than a thousand tons. Few are armed (reflecting their previous civilian status), although this is beginning to change: new ships are being armed with cannon and jamming capabilities. China operates by far the world's largest fleet of blue-water coast guard cutters. Its *Zhaotou*-class cutters are the largest coast guard ships in the world and represent an effort to standardize the fleet. China also has the largest coast guard fleet by far in the region. In fall 2020, the United States Coast Guard permanently based ships in the Western Pacific, reportedly in order to combat China's illegal fishing in the region.[56]

China's Maritime Militia. The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) is a reserve force of fisherman armed by the state and organized at the grassroots level.[57] The PAFMM began as a coastal patrol and surveillance force but evolved into a maritime sovereignty support force in the 1970s. For example, these forces play the leading role in island seizures in the Battle of the Paracel Islands against Vietnam in 1974.[58] Since then, the PAFMM has acted in support of the Chinese Coast Guard and PLAN in establishing control over the SCS, including the seizure of Mischief Reef and Scarborough Shoal from

the Philippines in 1995 and 2012, respectively.[59] The PAFMM is often used for swarming, ramming, and harassing the ships of all claimants and those of the United States—thus making it difficult and risky for these countries to operate freely and safely within their EEZs and international waters more broadly. The PAFMM plays a key role along with the Coast Guard in what China refers to as its "Maritime Rights Protection Force System" (*weiquan liliang tixi*).[60]

The Chinese Navy. The Chinese Navy also plays a role in advancing China's position in maritime disputes, as part of the PLAN's mission is "safeguarding China's rights and interests in the SCS." The South Sea Fleet, which falls under the Southern Theater Command located in Guangdong province, is in charge of this mission. The South Sea Fleet has a higher proportion of advanced warships compared to the other regional fleets, such as destroyers. The South Sea Fleet is responsible for coastal defense from Dongshan to the Vietnam border and into the sea, including the Paracel and Spratly Islands. To fulfill this mission, the fleet has support bases at Yulin and Guangzhou, maintains long-distance supply ships, and is supplemented with Marine Brigades 1st and 64th, with a dedicated amphibious force. The equipment of the South Sea Fleet includes 24 submarines (4 SSBNs, 4SSNs, 16 SSKs), 9 destroyers (9 DDGHMs), 23 frigates (11FFGHMs, 2 FFGMs, 10 FFGs), 38 patrol and coastal combatants (38 PCFG/PCGs), 3 amphibious ships (3 LPDs), 22 logistics vessels (22 LSs), and 18 countermine vessels (18 MCMVs). In addition to the South Sea Fleet, the Southern Theater Command houses the 74th Group & 75th Group of the Army for ground forces, as well as the 2nd, 9th, and 18th fighter divisions, the 8th bomber division, the 13th transport division, and the 20th special mission division for air forces. The Southern Theater Command also has the GX-6 高新六号 (*gaoxin liuhao*) Unit deployed in the SCS for anti-submarine warfare purposes. In comparison to the Northern and Eastern Sea Fleets, the South Sea Fleet has the highest volume of vessels, which suggests a greater prioritization of the South Sea defense for China.[61]

There have also been a number of advancements in the broader PLAN that will affect the balance of power in the SCS, such as the advent of China's new *Renhai*-class cruisers, the largest surface combatant in the world. The first *Renhai*-class cruiser was commissioned in January 2020.[62] The Chinese aircraft carriers *Liaoning* and *Shandong* conducted regular training and sea trials over the summer and most recently in September.[63] While the

Shandong entered service this past December, it is not yet combat-ready, and the *Liaoning* took six years to achieve initial operational capacity after it was commissioned in 2012.[64]

Interestingly, the Navy has been relegated to a secondary role, with SCS operations considered Operations Other Than War. Almost all the elements of the PLAN surface fleet patrol waters, and the fleet has grown rapidly in recent years, moving from a fleet of mostly submarines and missile craft to a first-rate, blue-water navy centered on large surface combatants. All of the Chinese Navy's platforms, both undersea and surface, could be used to coerce, blockade, attack, or occupy the SCS islands. China currently has the largest navy in the world, with 300 ships that include aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, submarines, and amphibious assault ships. The construction of the Type 095s nuclear attack submarine, which began in 2017, and the first Type 055 Nanchang destroyers that China will likely put in service this year could be useful in restricting access.[65]

Reliance on the coast guard and maritime militia to enforce China's claims in the SCS is not random; it reinforces China's attempts to convince other countries that its claims are legitimate without being provocative enough to spark a military backlash. When operating in disputed waters, the Chinese coast guard does so on the pretext of routine domestic maritime law enforcement. In August 2016, China's Supreme People's Court issued two judicial interpretations defining the authority of Chinese maritime law-enforcement agencies to handle foreign and domestic violations in China's claimed jurisdictional waters. Specifically, it concluded that the "Chinese coast guard has the authority to arrest foreign mariners suspected of poaching in China's claimed jurisdictional waters and charge them with violations of the criminal code. It also authorizes criminal proceedings against foreigners found merely entering China's claimed territorial waters."[66]

In other words, Chinese behavior in the SCS confirms the outcome intentions suggested by discourse—China wants to establish control over the SCS.

Force Posture on SCS islands. Another informative area of overlap between behavior and capabilities is Chinese land reclamation in the SCS. China has reclaimed approximately 3,200 acres of land between the Spratly and Paracel islands while building up almost 30 outposts across the various islands.[67] Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, and Mischief Reef all now feature

lengthy airfields as well as substantial numbers of buildings and other structures. The construction and militarization of these islands have also greatly expanded China's maritime awareness and the range of its targeting capabilities, allowing China to exert military control over the sea and airspace in the SCS for the first time.[68]

These capabilities provide some useful information about Chinese outcome intentions. First, China has deployed to the SCS the types of systems the PLA would need to exert control over the SCS.[69] Control requires both a comprehensive awareness of the environment and the capabilities to compel and coerce states to follow the PLA's rules. To achieve this, China first needs systems that monitor activity on and under the sea and in the air in the disputed areas, such as forward-deployed surveillance aircraft.

Once China establishes an awareness of others' activities in the SCS, it will need certain capabilities to enforce its sovereignty claims. These include multirole fighters that can be used to intercept and escort other countries' aircraft; these fighters can be deployed to the SCS islands or operate off an aircraft carrier in the area. These are precisely the types of capabilities that are periodically deployed to the islands.[70] One capability the PLA would need if it were to control the SCS that we have not seen is command and control (C2) aircraft. The Southern Theater Command is far from the Spratly Islands in particular, and greater connectivity in the form of C2 is a step we should expect to see as the transition to the theater commands is completed.

Some commentators have been dismissive of China's military outposts in the SCS, claiming that they grant no significant warfighting capability. In peacetime, they undoubtedly contribute significantly to China's attempt to consolidate control over the SCS, specifically in three ways. First, the outposts facilitate a consistent and routine Chinese military presence in these waters, as ships and aircraft rely on facilities there for sustainment and replenishment. Second, the fact that China has built and militarized these islands without pushback from the United States causes Southeast Asia states to question U.S. commitment to the region, making it more likely that they will bandwagon with China. Third, China has begun to build a maritime awareness network from sensors and radars deployed to these islands. Noticing, identifying, and tracking other aircraft and ships is a necessary step toward establishing control over the sea and airspace in the SCS—a process intention to which these capabilities contribute.

But the outposts are also problematic in wartime. First, the United States would have a difficult time conducting an amphibious assault on the islands. Deploying vulnerable landing craft requires large, secure beachheads, and given Chinese radars and U.S. high-signature amphibious assault forces, China would have ample warning to ensure that access was denied. Specifically, the U.S. Marines are trained for large-scale forcible entry, not island hopping on short notice in the SCS. It would take 45–60 days to get the sealift necessary to transport 12,000 marines, and then landing craft would need to get within 12 miles of the islands. This scenario is highly unlikely, given that the landing craft has no missile defense, and China would be able to target them with conventional missiles long before they came sufficiently close.

Conclusions. This review of capabilities, coupled with Chinese behavior in the SCS, supports a number of conclusions about Chinese intentions with high confidence. Regarding Chinese objectives, China intends to gain a military advantage in the first island chain and then to establish control over the SCS. There is no other purpose this military buildup can logically support. Chinese activities tell us that "control" at the very least means preventing other countries from exploiting the living and non-living resources found in the waters (oil, gas, fisheries, etc.) and restricting all military activities in the first island chain. But what is less clear is the extent to which China would disrupt commercial activities; discourse and behavior suggest its desire to prevent all military activities and at the very least severely restrict resource exploitation and fishing within the SCS, but there is no evidence of plans to restrict broader commercial activities, especially in peacetime. Moreover, the capabilities and military exercises do not indicate a near-term desire to gain control over additional islands occupied by other claimants.

Chinese capabilities also suggest three things about Chinese process intentions. First, in the short term, China will continue to focus on compelling other regional claimants to capitulate to its control over the SCS via coercive measures short of military use of force. Its use primarily of law enforcement platforms against other claimants keeps the tensions below the threshold of conflict but supports its legal narrative that these waters are already Chinese. The reliance on its maritime militia and law enforcement fleet to engage in grey zone activities suggests that China is relatively risk-averse in its willingness to engage directly with U.S. forces.

Recommendations

This analysis reveals that China's maritime ambitions in the ECS and the SCS are detrimental to U.S. and allied interests, mostly because of China's ultimate objectives of control and dominance. The means by which China has pursued its objectives to date are problematic insofar as they are effective–but leveraging the economic and diplomatic tools of statecraft is objectively better than overt use of force. Nevertheless, the United States still needs to prevent Beijing from incrementally advancing its control over the South China Sea. Below are a few recommendations in support of this objective.

- The United States should expand and increase the tempo of its military operations in the SCS to show that China has not dissuaded the United States by increasing the risk to U.S. forces.

- In the military realm, the United States should prioritize coalition building to ensure a free and open South China Sea. This could include a joint patrol task force akin to the multinational effort to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Or the United States and its partners could agree on a case-by-case basis to escort fishing vessels and oil exploration platforms when assistance is requested.

- The United States should specify that its U.S. alliance commitments extend to protection of countries' rights within their EEZs.

- To further increase costs to China, the United States could warn Beijing that it may reconsider its neutral position on the sovereignty of the South China Sea disputed islands to support claimants with less expansive and restrictive EEZ claims unless China moderates its EEZ claims and agrees to international law positions on maritime rights.

- The United States should respond immediately to each aggressive act China takes in these waters, *regardless of its target*. Moreover, the United States should be sure to respond even when a treaty ally is not involved—this would stress that the United States is serious about protecting international norms, regardless of who the transgressors are and what the violation is.

- When China commits an act of aggression or coercion, the Chinese assets or organizations involved should not determine the U.S. response. Instead, the United States should feel free to respond to paramilitary actors as it would to military actors.

- To reconstitute its deterrent, the United States should seek military access to new partner facilities in the SCS. The United States should also improve the quality of other claimants' maritime reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities and build their defensive capabilities.

- Lastly, the United States should spearhead and prioritize a diplomatic solution to the South China Sea disputes, with or without China. Countries in the region disagree with China's interpretation of international law. If the rest of the claimants agree about the islands' sovereignty and the rights granted by those islands and ask the international community to help enforce the agreement, China will have difficulty pushing its claims and pressuring states unilaterally to concede to its demands. If Beijing refuses to follow these rules, Washington should form a coalition to restrict China's access to technology and related information. Washington should even threaten to expel Beijing from the relevant international regimes.

The most effective U.S. strategy should combine diplomatic initiatives with a robust deterrent posture in the region. For any of these initiatives to succeed, the United States will need a lasting strategy to deter China's aggression, respond if a confrontation does occur and, if necessary, defeat China in a military conflict. Success will require bipartisan consensus and an agreement that maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific is genuinely critical to U.S. national interests. The United States has made some progress in this regard, but given the extent of China's maritime ambitions, it is not yet enough.

The views expressed are the author's alone, and do not represent the views of the U.S. Government or the Wilson Center.

Notes

1. David Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?" *International Security* 42:4 (May 17, 2018): 85–127.
2. Michael G. Gallagher, "China's Illusory Threat to the South China Sea," *International Security* 19:1 (1994): 169–94, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539152.; *Nick Bisley, "What Does China Actually Want in the South China Sea?," The National Interest,* October 27, 2016, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-does-china-actually-want-the-south-china-sea-18211.
3. Jane Perlez, "A U.S. Admiral's Bluntness Rattles China, and Washington (Published 2016)," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2016, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/07/world/asia/us-admiral-harry-harris.html.
4. Donald K. Emmerson, "Why Does China Want to Control the South China Sea?," *The Diplomat,* May 24, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/why-does-china-want-to-control-the-south-china-sea/.; Bisley, "What Does China Actually Want in the South China Sea?"; Patrick M. Cronin and Ryan Neuhard, "Total Competition: China's Challenge in the South China Sea," Center for a New American Security, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20439.5.; Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U. S. Response," *International Security* 34:2 (2009): 46–81.
5. Sara McLaughlin Mitchell and Peter F. Trumbore, "Rogue States and Territorial Disputes," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31:3 (July 1, 2014): 323–39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894213508711.; John A. Vasquez, "Why Do Neighbors Fight? Proximity, Interaction, or Territoriality," *Journal of Peace Research* 32:3 (1995): 277–93.or Territoriality,\\uc0\\u8221{} {\\i{}Journal of Peace Research} 32, no. 3 (1995
6. Sam Bateman, "What Are Australia's Interests in the South China Sea?" The Strategist, May 28, 2015, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-are-australias-interests-in-the-south-china-sea/.
7. David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies* 12:1 (October 1, 2002): 1–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410212120002.; Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," ed. by Alexander Wendt, *International Security* 25:2 (2000): 187–212.; Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," *International Security* 19:3 (1994): 50–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539079.; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9780801494185/the-origins-of-alliances/.; Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7:1 (September 1, 1997): 114–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419708429336.: 114–155; John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19:3 (1994): 5–49, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539078.; Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security* 39:3 (2014): 48–88.
8. Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51:4 (ed 1997): 513–53, https://doi.

org/10.1162/002081897550447.interests, and institutions influence state behavior by shaping state preferences, that is, the fundamental social purposes underlying the strategic calculations of governments. For liberals, the configuration of state preferences matters most in world politics—not, as realists argue, the configuration of capabilities and not, as institutionalists (that is, functional regime theorists; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183.

9. Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security* 27:4 (2003): 5–56.
10. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rkxt.; Jeffrey Legro, "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (September 1, 2007): 515–34, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707071526.
11. "Intention" (Merriam-Webster), accessed November 19, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intention.
12. Adam Tanner Stevenson Reed, "Kosovo Independence Declaration Deemed Legal," *Reuters*, July 22, 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-kosovo-idUSTRE66L01720100722.; Douglas Hamilton, "Kosovo Declares Independence from Serbia," *Reuters*, February 17, 2008, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-serbia-idUSHAM53437920080217.
13. Legro, "What China Will Want."
14. Joel Wuthnow, "Deciphering China's Intentions: What Can Open Sources Tell Us? | The Asan Forum," *ASAN Forum* (blog), July 29, 2019, http://www.theasanforum.org/deciphering-chinas-intentions-what-can-open-sources-tell-us/.
15. Erik Lin-Greenberg, "Backing up, Not Backing down: Mitigating Audience Costs through Policy Substitution," *Journal of Peace Research* 56:4 (July 1, 2019): 559–74, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319832641.
16. James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88:3 (Sep. 1994): 577–92; Jessica Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62:1 (2008): 35–64; Kenneth A. Schultz, "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45:1 (2001): 32–60; Kenneth A. Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review* 94:4 (1998): 829–44.
17. Anne E. Sartori, "The Might of the Pen: A Reputation Theory of Communication in International Disputes," *International Organization* 56:1 (Winter 2002). Honesty refers to the degree to which a leader's discourse has served as an accurate foreshadowing of what a country has tried to achieve.
18. 国务院新闻办公室 (State Council Information Office), "中国坚持通过谈判解决中国与菲律宾在南海的有关争议 (White Paper: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the SCS)," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, published July 13, 2016, http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/34102/34818/34825/Document/1483630/1483630.htm.

19. 国务院新闻办公室 (State Council Information Office), "中国坚持通过谈判解决中国与菲律宾在南海的有关争议 (White Paper: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the SCS)."
20. "新时代中国的国防 (China's National Defense in the New Era)," Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, published July 24, 2019, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2019-07/24/content_4846424.htm.
21. "习近平:任何人要侵犯中国主权 中国人民都不会答应 (Xi Jinping: Chinese People Will not Agree to Anyone Trying to Violate China's Sovereignty)," *Global Times*, October 18, 2015, https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJQFo4; "独家：习近平出访英国前接受路透采访的问答全文 (Reuters' Interview with Xi Jinping Prior to His Visit to the U.K.)," *Reuters*, October 18, 2015, https://cn.reuters.com/article/exclusive-xinhua-idCNKCS0SC0RO20151018.
22. "习近平会见美国总统奥巴马 (Xi Jinping Met with U.S. President Obama)," *Xinhua News*, April 1, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-04/01/c_1118506458.htm; "习近平在亚信第五次外长会议开幕式上的讲话 (Xi Jinping's Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia)," *Xinhua News*, April 28, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-04/28/c_1118761158.htm.
23. Author's interviews in Beijing May 2019. For a more detailed account, see Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Beijing's Line on the South China Sea: Nothing to See Here," *The Interpreter,* November 27, 2020, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/beijing-s-line-south-china-sea-nothing-to-see-here.
24. This includes 习近平, 李克强, 张德江, 俞正声, 刘云山, 王岐山, 张高丽, 马凯, 王沪宁, 刘延东, 刘奇葆, 许其亮, 孙春兰, 李建国, 李源潮, 汪洋, 张春贤, 范长龙, 孟建柱, 赵乐际, 栗战书, 郭金龙, 韩正, 丁薛祥, 王晨, 刘鹤, 李希, 李强, 李鸿忠, 杨洁篪, 杨晓渡, 张又侠, 陈希, 陈全国, 陈敏尔, 胡春华, 郭声琨, 黄坤明, 蔡奇 (39 people. It does not include 孙政才 because he was arrested. The People data excluded his discourse.) Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan, Zhang Gaoli, Ma Kai, Wang Huning, Liu Yandong, Liu Qibao, Xu Qiliang, Sun Chunlan, Li Jianguo, Li Yuanchao, Wang Yang, Zhang Chunxian, Fan Changlong, Meng Jianzhu, Zhao Leji, Li Zhanshu, GuoJinlong, Han Zheng, Ding Xuexiang, Wang Chen, Liu He, Li Xi, Li Qiang, LiHongzhong, Yang Jiechi, Yang Xiaodu, Zhang Youxia, Chen Xi, Chen Quanguo, Chen Miner, Hu Chunhua, Guo Shengkun, Huang Kunming, Cai Qi (Sun Zhengcai excluded).
25. 国务院新闻办公室 (State Council Information Office), "中国坚持通过谈判解决中国与菲律宾在南海的有关争议 (White Paper: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the SCS)"; "新时代中国的国防 (China's National Defense in the New Era)," Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, published July 24, 2019, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2019-07/24/content_4846424.htm.
26. 国务院新闻办公室 (State Council Information Office), "中国坚持通过谈判解决中国与菲律宾在南海的有关争议 (White Paper: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the SCS)"; "新时代中国的国防 (China's National Defense in the New Era)," Ministry of

National Defense of the People's Republic of China, published July 24, 2019, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2019-07/24/content_4846424.htm.

27. "新时代中国的国防 (China's National Defense in the New Era)," Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, published July 24, 2019, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2019-07/24/content_4846424.htm.
28. "习近平：我们伟大祖国的每一寸领土都绝对不能也绝对不可能从中国分割出去 (Xi Jinping: Not An Inch of the Territory of Our Great Country Can be Taken Away)," *Xinhua News*, March 20, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/20/c_1122563203.htm; "习近平：祖国的神圣领土一寸都不能分裂出去！(Xi Jinping: Not An Inch of China's Holy Territory Can be Taken Away)," *China Youth Daily*, December 18, 2018, http://news.youth.cn/sz/201812/t20181218_11817785.htm.
29. "中国与东盟须强化合作与互信 促进南海问题解决 (China and ASEAN Must Strengthen Cooperation and Mutual Trust to Promote Resolution of SCS Problem)," *People's Daily*, July 10, 2012, http://world.people.com.cn/n/2012/0710/c157278-18482919.html; 吴士存 (Wu Shicun), "提升中国-东盟军事互信需要更多制度性安排 (Enhancing China-ASEAN Military Trust Requires More Institutional Arrangements)," 中国南海研究院 (National Institute for SCS Studies), published December 13, 2019, http://www.nanhai.org.cn/review_c/403.html.
30. "2020年7月14日外交部发言人赵立坚主持例行记者会 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Zhao Lijian Held Press Conference)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 14, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/t1797678.shtml.
31. For more on the Chinese military's signaling strategy in the SCS, see Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The PLA's Evolving Role in China's South China Sea Strategy," China Leadership Monitor, Issue 66, Winter 2020.
32. Carl Thayer, "A Closer Look at the ASEAN-China Single Draft South China Sea Code of Conduct," *The Diplomat*, August 3, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/a-closer-look-at-the-asean-china-single-draft-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/.
33. Viet Hoang, "The Code of Conduct for the South China Sea: A Long and Bumpy Road," *The Diplomat*, September 28, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-code-of-conduct-for-the-south-china-sea-a-long-and-bumpy-road/.
34. Felix K. Chang, "Uncertain Prospects: South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiations," Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 6, 2020, https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/10/uncertain-prospects-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-negotiations/.diplomats from Southeast Asian countries and China have met to discuss the implementation of a "code of conduct" for the South China Sea. The goal of that code is to manage the tensions that may arise from disputes between the region's claimants, including Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and more recently Indonesia. Back in 2002, they signed the "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," which set the stage for a formal code that was to follow. The declaration's terms were as narrowly crafted as they were brief. The signatories simply pledged to peacefully settle their differences and "exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability." The declaration gave no indication that the code

would seek a resolution to the disputes in the South China Sea, nor require its parties to adhere to its terms.","container-title":"Foreign Policy Research Institute","language":"en-US","note":"section: Analysis","title":"Uncertain Prospects: South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiations","title-short":"Uncertain Prospects","URL":"https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/10/uncertain-prospects-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-negotiations/","author":[{"family":"Chang","given":"Felix K."}],"accessed":{"date-parts":[["2020",11,23]]},"issued":{"date-parts":[["2020",10,6]]}}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}

35. Jane Perlez, "Tribunal Rejects Beijing's Claims in South China Sea (Published 2016)," *The New York Times*, July 12, 2016, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/world/asia/south-china-sea-hague-ruling-philippines.html.
36. Julian Ku and Chris Mirasola, "Tracking China's Compliance with the South China Sea Arbitral Award," Lawfare, October 3, 2016, https://www.lawfareblog.com/tracking-chinas-compliance-south-china-sea-arbitral-award.
37. Jarrod Fiecoat, "With Strings Attached: China's Economic Policy in the South China Sea," Naval Postgraduate School, 2016.
38. Fiecoat.
39. Timothy McLaughlin, "A U.S. Ally Is Turning to China to 'Build, Build, Build,'" *The Atlantic*, May 8, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/philippines-us-ally-china-investment/588829/.
40. Ryan Martinson, "Echelon Defense: The Role of Sea Power in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy," *CMSI Red Books*, February 1, 2018, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-red-books/15.
41. Lyle J. Morris et al., "Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War," RAND Corporation, June 27, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html.
42. Khanh Vu, "Vietnam Protests Beijing's Sinking of South China Sea Boat," *Reuters*, April 4, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinasea-idUSKBN21M072.
43. Ibid.
44. YouTube, *Chinese Coastguard Ship Douses Vietnam Fishing Boat in South China Sea Clash*, Youtube, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30GTmLourT8.
45. Rozanna Latiff Ananthalakshmi A., "Malaysian Oil Exploration Vessel Leaves South China Sea Waters after Standoff," *Reuters*, May 12, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-security-malaysia-idUSKBN22O1M9.
46. Steven Lee Myers and Keith Bradsher, "China Fires Missiles Into South China Sea, Sending U.S. a Message," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2020, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/27/world/asia/missiles-south-china-sea.html.
47. Steven Stashwick, "Photos Show Massive Chinese Naval Exercise in South China Sea," *The Diplomat,* March 29, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/photos-show-massive-chinese-naval-exercise-in-south-china-sea/.
48. Kristin Huang, "Chinese Warplanes Take South China Sea Exercises to New Level," *South China Morning Post*, December 16, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3042243/chinese-warplanes-take-south-china-sea-exercises-new-level.

49. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "China's Maritime Ambitions," § Committee on Foreign Affairs (2020), https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=110841.
50. CSIS, "Are Maritime Law Enforcement Forces Destabilizing Asia? CSIS, 2021, https://csis-ilab.github.io/cpower-viz/csis-china-sea/
51. For a complete list, see Mastro, "The PLA's Evolving Role in China's South China Sea Strategy."
52. For more details and evidence, see Mastro, "The PLA's Evolving Role in China's South China Sea Strategy."
53. China Military Online, "美须停止在南海问题上煽风点火-中国军网 [The U.S. Must Stop Fanning the Flames on the South China Sea Issue-China Military]," *China Military Online,* August 7, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2020-08/07/content_9876689.htm.
54. Martinson, "Echelon Defense."
55. Taige Hu, "NPCSC Session Watch: COVID-19 Responses, Copyright, Armed Police Reform & Silence on 2020 NPC (Updated)," NPC Observer, April 17, 2020, https://npcobserver.com/2020/04/17/npcsc-session-watch-covid-19-responses-copyright-armed-police-reform-silence-on-2020-npc/. Drake Long, "Question about the CCG and PLA," November 3, 2020.
56. "U.S. Coast Guard to Tackle China's 'illegal' Fishing in Pacific," *D.W.*, October 24, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/us-coast-guard-to-tackle-chinas-illegal-fishing-in-pacific/a-55381671.
57. Connor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA," China Maritime Report (Newport: China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, March 2017), http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Erickson-Publication_Maritime-Militia_China_Third-Sea-Force_Tethered-to-the-PLA_China-Maritime-Report-1_201703_NEW-COVER.pdf PAGE?
58. Derek Grossman and Logan Ma, "A Short History of China's Fishing Militia and What It May Tell Us," *RAND Blog* (blog), April 6, 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/04/a-short-history-of-chinas-fishing-militia-and-what.html.
59. Andrew S. Erickson, "Shining a Spotlight: Revealing China's Maritime Militia to Deter Its Use," *The National Interest*, November 25, 2018, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/shining-spotlight-revealing-china%E2%80%99s-maritime-militia-deter-its-use-36842.
60. Kennedy and Erickson, "China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA."
61. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Military Balance 2018," IISS, February 2018, https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2018.
62. Zachary Williams, "The PLAN's Renhai-Class Cruiser and the Future of Anti-Access and Area Denial," *The Diplomat*, accessed October 23, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/the-plans-renhai-class-cruiser-and-the-future-of-anti-access-and-area-denial/.; Xavier Vavasseur, "Shipyard in China Launched The 25th Type 052D and 8th Type 055 Destroyers For PLAN," *Naval News* (blog), August 30, 2020, https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/08/shipyard-in-china-launched-the-25th-type-052d-and-8th-type-055-destroyers-for-plan/.
63. "China's Aircraft Carriers Conduct Sea Trials, Training as Planned," *CGTN*, September 24, 2020, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-24/China-s-aircraft-carriers-conduct-sea-trials-training-as-planned-U2Z37Y3e8g/index.html.

64. Liu Zhen, "China's Shandong Aircraft Carrier Leaves Port for Latest Aerial Drill," *South China Morning Post*, September 2, 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3099799/chinas-shandong-aircraft-carrier-leaves-port-latest-drill.
65. Liu Zhen, "After Heavy Investment, China's next Generation of Weapons and Military Equipment Nears Readiness," *South China Morning Post*, December 23, 2018, sec. News, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2179198/after-heavy-investment-chinas-next-generation-weapons-and."container-title":"South China Morning Post","language":"en","note":"section: News","title":"After heavy investment, China's next generation of weapons and military equipment nears readiness","URL":"https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2179198/after-heavy-investment-chinas-next-generation-weapons-and","author":[{"family":"Zhen","given":"Liu"}],"accessed":{"date-parts":[["2020",11,19]]},"issued":{"date-parts":[["2018",12,23]]}}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}
66. Martinson, "Echelon Defense."
67. CSIS, "China Island Tracker," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, accessed November 19, 2020, https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/china/.
68. For a complete list of the capabilities deployed on these outposts, see Oriana Skylar Mastro, Lowy.
69. Ben Werner, "New Air Bases, Baby Cabbage Key to Chinese Long-Term Claims in South China Sea," *USNI News*, June 3, 2020, https://news.usni.org/2020/06/03/new-air-bases-baby-cabbage-key-to-chinese-long-term-claims-on-south-china-sea.
70. Most movements of platforms and equipment were conducted in the context of a military exercise. (Although from the outside, it is difficult to decipher whether the PLA is using the guise of a supporting exercise to create a permanent presence on these islands.)