

The Competition in the South China Sea

-China's Land Reclamation and U.S.'s Freedom of Navigation Operation

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Abstract

In recent years, China has actively reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, making the original small island reefs into larger islands, and gradually completed the deployment of military facilities such as airports, terminals, missiles, warplanes, and radar communication systems. Since 2010, China has carried out large-scale reclamation projects on the South Island Reef, and completed the militarization of the South Island Reef in 2017 to achieve full coverage of the South China Sea by military forces. Regarding China's deployment of military facilities in the South China Sea, the U.S. pays close attention and warns at any time. In order to counter China's expansion of military power in the South China Sea, the U.S. actively implemented the counter-measure thought the right of Freedom of Navigation. In order to understand the competition between China and the U.S. in the South China Sea, this article analyzes the strategic considerations and actions of China and the U.S. in the South China Sea from the perspective of offensive realism. The content includes discussion of offensive realism, analysis of China's and the U.S.' strategic thinking in the South China Sea, exploration of China's land reclamation and US's freedom of navigation, and prediction of possible developments in the future.

Key words : South China Sea, Offensive Realism, Land Reclamation, Freedom of Navigation Operations

Introduction

In recent years, China has actively carried out land reclamation projects in the South China Sea(SCS). In 2017, China has fully completed the construction of ports, military camps, artillery, airports, and radar systems in the South Island Reef, and has taken off and landed military aircraft. It can

be understood from these facilities that China has achieved comprehensive coverage of the SCS by military forces. In addition, China has also completed the forward deployment of troops and equipment to accelerate the military base of islands and reefs to effectively extend the operational depth and build the SCS region as a strategic

base. After the PLA obtains actual control, it will be conducive to the claim of the SCS and the development of marine resources. It will also ensure China's core interests and sustainable development in the SCS, and create a new status quo that is in line with China's international status and influence.

Regarding China's reclamation and deployment of military facilities in the SCS, the U.S. government always concerns and warns. The U.S. executes free navigation operations actively around China's artificial island reefs. For the U.S., China's aggressive military construction in the SCS is not just to increase its own security, but is an attempt to expand its influence in the SCS and exclude U.S. hegemonic power in Asia. However, Xi Jinping advocates the national goals of the "China Dream" and "Ocean Power", and emphasizes that the core interests of the state must not be sacrificed. The relevant tough attitude strengthens China's position on the SCS issue. Therefore, the strategic competition between China and the US in the SCS is hard to avoid.

In recent years, China and the U.S. have focused their operation in the SCS on island militarization and freedom of navigation. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has adopted a strategy of sovereign expansion, continued island reclamation in the SCS region, constructed military facilities, and even used military advantages to seize the islands originally occupied by Vietnam and Philippines. China's offensive and forced military actions have caused the US serious concerns and dissatisfaction. The U.S. has adopted the strategy of power balance to actively

promote the countermeasures of the free navigation operations in the SCS.

This article explores the strategic thinking of China and the U.S. in the SCS in recent years from the perspective of offensive realism, and analyzes the China's land reclamation, the U.S.'s Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) and the possible future development of China's and U.S.'s operations in the SCS.

Offensive Realism

Offensive realism inherits the important point of realism, and claims that the current international situation is anarchy. In order to survive, the state pursues maximization of power. It also proposes a new hegemonic argument that global hegemony is unreachable, and only regional hegemony is secure.

John Mearsheimer, the representative scholar of offensive realism, advocates that offensive realism is based on five important premises. 1.anarchy: it is a self-help system with no guaranteed limits on how others will behave; 2.offensive capability: states inevitably possess some offensive capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other; 3.intentions are uncertain: you can never know for sure what other states are going to do, especially in the future; 4.the survival goal: survival is the primary goal of great powers. Specifically, states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order; 5.rationality: great powers are rational actors. They are aware of their external environment and they think strategically about how to survive in it. In

particular, they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy for survival.¹

When the five assumptions come together, they create powerful incentives for great powers to think and act offensively with regard to each other. States, motivated to ensure their own security, will recognize that the safest position in the system is one of regional hegemony. Global hegemony would be safer but is essentially unattainable. The classical realist agrees that no people is great enough to establish world hegemony.² Only a regional hegemon exists that it will not be conquered by others. In the anarchic nature of the international system, states that can plausibly make bids for regional hegemony will do so, as a matter of their own assessment of their best chances for survival. States quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system, and only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system.³

Offensive realism advocates that the anarchic international system creates the strong motives for expansion. While all states seek to maximize their power in

relation to other states, only great powers can ensure the survival of the small states.⁴ Each state tends to see itself as vulnerable and alone, and therefore it aims to provide for its own survival. The claim that states maximize relative power is tantamount to argue that states are disposed to think offensively toward other states, even though their ultimate motive is simply to survive. In short, great powers have aggressive intentions. Even when a great power achieves a distinct military advantage over its rivals, it continues looking for chances to gain more power.⁵ Before great powers take offensive actions, they think carefully about the balance of power and about how other states will react to their moves. They weigh the costs and risks of offense against the likely benefits. If the benefits do not outweigh the risks, they sit tight and wait for a more propitious moment. Therefore, calculated aggression has become a better action for the state.⁶ Rational calculation is the criterion of national action.

Power in international politics is largely a product of the military forces that a state possesses. Great powers, however, can acquire different kinds of fighting forces, and how much of each kind they buy has important implications for the balance of power.⁷ A state's actual power is embedded

¹ These assumptions are organized from John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp.30-31

² John Lukacs, *George Kennan: A Study of Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p.48.

³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 2, 3, 33, 55.

⁴ Jeffrey Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International security*, Vol.25, No.3, Winter 2000, pp.128-129.

⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 34

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp.37-40

⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 55-68.

mainly in its army and the air and naval forces that directly support it. Armies are the central ingredient of military power, because they are the principal instrument for conquering and controlling territory-the paramount political objective in a world of territorial states. In short, the key component of military might, even in the nuclear age, is land power.⁸ Effective national power is the manifestation of military power. The stronger the military power, the greater the effective power. Military power is equal to power, and power equals security. The strongest military power is the best guarantee of security.

In order to implement the goal of national survival and security, the state should pursue the maximization of power. The more power it has, the better it should be, and it should be accumulated as soon as possible to prepare for any need.⁹ From the above argument, Offensive realism believes that in anarchy, international relations present a struggle for power, and the invasion intentions of powerful nations are unpredictable. To ensure the goal of national security, the state must continue to rationally pursue power expansion and strengthen military power to establish hegemonic status.

If a potential hegemon emerges among them, the other great powers in that region might be able to contain it by themselves.¹⁰

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.43.

⁹ Eric Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance*(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.2.

¹⁰ Hal Brands, "Fools Rush Out? The Flawed Logic of Offshore Balancing," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.38, No.2, Summer 2015, p.7.

The offensive realism holds that the rise of a potential regional hegemony would not be peaceful at all. The regional hegemony uses military power to assist other powers in the same region or directly eliminate threats to security.¹¹ That is, the dominant power in the international system strives hard to undermine that potential regional hegemony so as to secure its survival as a global dominant.

For the survival of the country, the rising states adopt a calculated offensive strategy of military expansion to counter regional hegemony; in order to prevent the emergence of potential hegemony, regional hegemony adopts the strategy of power balance to counterbalance the security challenge of potential hegemony by means of power balance. Therefore, if the strategic thinking and actions of China and the U.S. in the SCS are analyzed with offensive realism, China uses the strategy of military power expansion to actively build islands and reefs in the SCS for militarization; the U.S. adopts the strategy of power balance to exercise the Freedom of Navigation, thereby countering China's military expansion in the SCS and maintaining its hegemonic position in the SCS and the Asia-Pacific region.

The SCS is an important international waterway connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Andaman Sea to the Indian Ocean. It is also the only way to cross the Malacca Strait from Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. Who can control the SCS region can master the economy and military of East Asian

¹¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 236-237.

countries. For China, the SCS is not only related to the sovereignty of the state's territorial waters, but also an important goal to protect the marine economy, energy development and development of sea rights, and to challenge the U.S.' world supremacy. For the U.S., the SCS is mainly influenced by China's national power and its land reclamation in the SCS. In particular, China's military deployment in the SCS has prompted the U.S. to attach importance to the SCS region and strengthen its operations. The following analyzes the strategies of China and the U.S. in the SCS in recent years from the perspective of offensive realism.

China's Power Expansion

In John Mearsheimer's view, maximizing relative power to the point of hegemony is the ultimate aim of every state. For the goal of China's prosperity and strength, Xi Jinping puts forward the vision of the "Chinese Dream". Xi Jinping first proposed the "Chinese Dream" on November 29, 2012, and expounded the connotation of the "Chinese Dream" in March 2013. "To realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the state is to realize the prosperity of the state, the revitalization and happiness of the people. It deeply reflects the Chinese ideals today, as well as the glorious tradition of our people's unrelenting struggle for progress."¹² It can

be seen that the content of the "Chinese Dream" refers to the prosperity of the country, the revitalization of the state, and the happiness of the people.

Since 2013, Xi Jinping has been attempting to achieve the full regional hegemony in Asia through, for example, the Silk Road initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.¹³ In order to achieve the dream of "prospering the state", Xi Jinping further emphasized that "a strong state must first strengthen its army." During the inspection of the military region in December 2012, he pointed out, "Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese state is the greatest dream of the Chinese state in modern times. It can be said that this dream is a dream of strengthening the state, and also a dream of strengthening the army for the military. For a great revival, we must adhere to the unification of rich state and strong military forces, and strive to build and consolidate national defense and a strong army."¹⁴ For the PLA, the Chinese dream is a strong military dream.¹⁵ With a strong army and military strength, PLA maintains national security, and supports and services the achievement of the Chinese dream.

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¹³ Hiroaki Ataka, "Geopolitics or geobody politics? Understanding the rise of China and its actions in the South China sea", *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2016, p.80.

¹⁴ "Inspecting the Guangzhou Theater Xi Jinping declared a strong country and strong army," *Dakung*, 2012/12/13, <http://news.takungpao.com.hk/mainland/tkchina/2012-12/1322391.html>

¹⁵ Jeremy Page, "For Xi, a 'China Dream' of Military Power," *The Wall Street Journal*, 2013/3/13, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324128504578348774040546346>

¹² "Xi Jinping: Building on the Past and Inheriting the Past, Continues to the Future, Continues to Strive Forward towards the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation," *Xinhuanet*, 2012/11/29 , http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-11/29/c_113

The SCS is the most contested maritime space in the world. As an important commercial gateway for international shipping lines and a rich source of fisheries as well as other natural resources, the SCS has great political, economic and military strategic significance. The SCS is one of the world's busiest international sea-lanes. Over half of the world's merchant fleet (by tonnage) sails through the SCS every year. More than half of the world's oil tanker traffic passes through the region's waters. Over half of the top ten container shipping ports in the world are located in or around the SCS.¹⁶ For the energy-importing countries of East Asia, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, the SCS is the shortest, cheapest, and therefore main maritime route for vital energy imports and commodity exports. The importance of the SCS is further highlighted by China's example. Almost 80% of China's crude oil imports arrive through the SCS. In a way, this figure alone can explain why China's claims in the SCS are so ambitious- it seeks to protect its imports of oil and natural gas from any potential adversary.¹⁷ Rich in energy resources and fisheries, the waters of the SCS provide a vital source of economic security for neighbouring states. The area is economically and strategically crucial for all the countries involved in the disputes.

¹⁶ David Rosenberg, "Governing the South China Sea: From Freedom of the Seas to Ocean Enclosure Movements," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. XII, No. 3&4, Winter 2010, p.7.

¹⁷ Andrius Dirmeikis, *U.S. Role in Conflict Resolution: The Case of South China Sea Territorial Disputes*, Master Thesis (Kaunas: Department of Political Science, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Vytautas Magnus University, 2018), p.28.

In addition, China's strong foothold in the SCS secures an expansion of the Chinese maritime maneuver in the Asian seas. In recent years, China has established military equipment, built up an air defense identification zone in the SCS, and conducted military aircraft carrier cruise operations to ensure its control in the SCS. This expansion will enable China to dominate the Asian economy and the trade routes in Asia, as well as resolve its sovereignty disputes, including in the South and East China Seas based on its own terms. Most importantly, it will enable China to extend its influence beyond Asia to achieve global hegemony.¹⁸ The first clear indication of China to expand its maritime presence in the SCS was disclosed in the China defense white paper-*The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces of 2013*. In which stipulated that China's maritime forces must expand their tasks and strategies to protect China's sovereign maritime interests.¹⁹ China's Military Strategy of 2015 has also revealed China's endeavor for a wider maritime presence in the SCS to protect its core sovereign maritime interests.²⁰ The two documents show that China determinates to undermine

¹⁸ Dario Kuntic, "The ominous triangle: China-Taiwan- the United States relationship", *Croatian International Relations Review*, Vol. 21, No. 72, 2015, p.250-251.

¹⁹ Information Office of the State Council, "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces (2013)", "April 2013, https://media.nti.org/pdfs/China_Defense_White_Paper_2013.pdf

²⁰ The Department of Defense, "The Asian-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy (2015), " https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20AP_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF

the U.S. naval presence or deter it from further intervention on China's sovereign islands in the SCS, which is reinforced by the expanding strategy.

China has always insisted on the sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and its surrounding waters. In the white paper of China's Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation Policy released in 2017, China mentioned that "China has indisputable sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and its surrounding waters ... China has to respond to provocative actions that violate China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and deliberately provoke incidents that undermine peace and stability in the SCS. Any internationalization and judicialization of the SCS issue will not help resolve the dispute. On the contrary, it will only increase the difficulty of solving the problem and endanger regional peace and stability."²¹

Faced with external doubts about the expansion of the artificial islands and reefs in the SCS, China emphasized that the construction of the Spratly Islands and its surrounding waters is to safeguard national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. In particular, since Xi Jinping took office, he attached importance to the realization of the Chinese dream, and emphasized the claims of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, so that the artificial islands and reefs in the SCS region were more "crazy

construction".²² This military and diplomatic behavior is aggressive.²³ The pursuit of maximization of power, expansion of military power, and establishment of regional hegemonic status are important themes of offensive realism.

Offensive realism believes that the state's primary goal in anarchy is survival. The state must have offensive force, adopt an offensive strategy of prudent expansion of military power, pursue the maximization of relative power, and become the most powerful hegemonic state in the system. The survival of a state depends on preventing other countries from expanding their power and avoiding the emergence of evenly matched opponents, so no other state can threaten their survival. That is to say, for the survival and security of the state, under the rational behavior model, the rising powers are equal to power, and the state is bound to adopt an offensive strategy of calculated aggression of military power.²⁴ The operation of this strategic thinking can explain China's recent reclamation and deployment of military facilities for power expansion in the SCS.

China's power expansion in the SCS region adopts "Salami Slicing strategy"²⁵ or

²¹ The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China's Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation Policy," 2017/1/11, http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/regulatory/2017-01/11/content_4769725.htm

²² Hannah Beech, "China's Sea Control Is a Done Deal, 'Short of War With the U.S.'," The New York Times, 2018/9/20, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/asia/south-china-sea-navy.html>

²³ Sofia Lotto Persio, "China is Building Towns in the South China Sea that could House Thousands of Marines," Newsweek, 2018/5/24, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-building-towns-south-china-sea-could-house-thousands-marines-941928>.

²⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.37.

²⁵ "Salami Slicing strategy" refers to the gradual

"Cabbage Strategy".²⁶ China has been inhabiting small islands and reefs in the SCS for a long time. It has gradually accumulated evidence of territory possession through various actions, and has carried out large-scale reclamation and army construction projects on the occupied islands and reefs. It has gradually established China's core regional hegemony. At present, China has fully completed the construction of ports, military camps, positions, artillery fire, airports and radar systems in the South Island Reef in 2017, and has taken off and landed military aircraft, thereby achieving a level of control over the waterways and airspace of the SCS and achieving comprehensive coverage of the SCS(see Figure 1).

U.S.'s Power Balance

John Mearsheimer argues that the rise of China can not be peaceful. China will inevitably make a bid for regional hegemony while the US and most of China's neighbors attempt to contain China.²⁷ The U.S.

accumulation of small actions. Each small change in benefits will not become an excuse for an opponent or an international power to launch a war or military conflict. However, over time, it will gain significant Changes in interests. Robert Haddick, "Salami Slicing in the South China Sea," *Foreign Policy*, 2012/8/ 3, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/03/salami-slicing-in-the-south-china-sea/>

²⁶ "Cabbage Strategy" means that like the leaves of cabbage, China uses layers of naval vessels, fishing boats, and the Coast Guard to secure control of disputed islands. Ronald O'Rourke, *China's Actions in South and East China Seas: Implications for U.S. Interests*(Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), p.24.

²⁷ John Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol.3, No.4, 2010, p.382.

strategic thinking in the SCS is mainly influenced by China's national power and its land reclamation in the SCS. In particular, China's military deployment in the SCS has prompted the U.S. to attach importance to the SCS region and strengthen its military operations. In response to changes in the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, President Trump proposes the "Indo-Pacific Strategy(IPS)" to counter China's rise.

The U.S. Department of Defense officially released its first "Indo-Pacific Strategy" report in 2019. The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report affirms the enduring U.S. commitment to stability and prosperity in the region through the pursuit of preparedness, partnerships, and the promotion of a networked region.²⁸ The IPS mainly focuses on two points:²⁹

- 1.Preventing China from obtaining absolute power in the Indo-Pacific region, including South East Asia and the Indian Ocean region. In the U.S. view, this would lead to China enjoying overwhelming advantages on maritime issues, having absolute domination of regional economic development, and having absolute discourse power on regional security and economic rules.
- 2.The IPS aims to maintain U.S.'s control in the Indo-Pacific region, such as control of sea lanes and regional economic agenda. The IPS would balance China and building quadrilateral security cooperation mechanisms in order to deal with the possible situation that China

²⁸ The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*(US: the Department of Defense, 2019), pp.17-52.

²⁹ Wu Shicun and Jayanath Colombage, *Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response*(China: Institute for South China Sea Studies, 2019), p.8.

may obtain unilateral overwhelming force advantage and try to exclude the U.S. from regional economic and security order building.

The main consideration of the U.S. “Indo-Pacific Strategy” is to prevent the bilateral balance of maritime power from continuing to develop in favor of China. Its tactics are designed to weaken the continually growing influence of China in the vast Indo-Pacific region, including the SCS, and to maintain the U.S.’ overwhelming superiority of strength. Under the framework of the IPS, the SCS has important strategic implications. The SCS has rich reserves of gas and oil resources that are well located near the large-scale energy-consuming countries. Furthermore, the SCS area is the international’s second busiest sea lane. Facing the challenge of China’s claims in the SCS, the US has sought to balance Beijing in the SCS through exercises and stepped up FONOP.³⁰ Since 2017, the U.S. military has significantly increased the frequency, scope and intensity of its operations in the SCS region(see Table 1).

Since Donald Trump took office, the U.S.’s military has conducted so-called FONOPs 28 times in the SCS. The Pentagon has dispatched one or two destroyers to the territorial seas or the adjacent waters of Paracels islands, Spratlys islands, and Scarborough Shoal islands six times without the permission of Beijing. After the U.S. President Joe Biden described China as the

U.S. "most serious competitor" and outlined plans to confront Beijing's "attack on human rights, intellectual property, and global governance,"³¹ the guided-missile destroyer USS Russell's FONOP followed a similar operation conducted by the USS John S McCain in the Paracel Islands in the northwestern area of the sea 12 days previous. It also come less than a week after two US aircraft carriers, the USS Theodore Roosevelt and USS Nimitz, conducted rare dual-carrier drills in the SCS.³²

From Trump’s policy of expanding military power and emphasizing on the Indian-Pacific strategy, and Joe Biden’s defense to US allies, it can be seen that in order to maintain power, maximize power, and rule out the rise of regional hegemony(China), the U.S. strategy in the SCS is dominated by “power balance” strategy of offensive realism, and by means of check and balance of power. The free navigation of U.S. Navy is obvious action.³³ In order to prevent China’s influence of expansion and maintain the U.S.’ the interests of the SCS, the U.S. actively operates the “power balance” strategy and implements free navigation actions in the

³⁰ Derek Grossman, *Military Build-Up in the South China Sea*(CA: Rand, 2020),p.13.

³¹ Joe Biden, “America’s Place in the World,” The White House, 2021/2/4, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-america-place-in-the-world/>

³² Brad Lendon, “US steps up challenges to Chinese-claimed islands in South China Sea,” CNN, 2021/2/17, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/17/asia/us-navy-south-china-sea-freedom-of-navigation-intl-hnk/index.html>

³³ Ronald O'Rourke, *China’s Actions in South and East China Seas: Implications for U.S. Interests*(Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), pp.48-49.

SCS.

FONOPs are not primarily about military deterrence or diplomatic messaging, though in a politically charged atmosphere like the SCS those play a role. At its root, FONOPs are legal exercises to reinforce the U.S.' interpretations of international maritime law. They are a means to ensure that U.S. naval, coast guard, and civilian ships, and by extension those of all nations, maintain unrestricted access to their rights at sea. In this particular case, the U.S. also needed to demonstrate its commitment to freedom of navigation as regional allies and partners had grown concerned in the wake of China's massive island building and construction of potential military facilities including airstrips in the Spratlys.³⁴ FONOPs conducted by the U.S. in the disputed areas of the SCS are more provocative and targeted. These FONOPs highlighted the determination of the U.S. to prevent the rise of China in the SCS and continue to maintain its influence and hegemony in the SCS.

China's Land Reclamation

Xi Jinping's offensive strategy in the SCS has shown that SCS plays an important role in his endeavor for regional hegemony. Reclamation and build the artificial islands are the policies of China to tighten its control over the disputed islands in the SCS. Since 2010, China has begun the expansion of 7 major islands in the SCS and the

infrastructure of the islands. These reef plates, which were only exposed at low tide, have increased by millions of times after sand reclamation.³⁵ According to the contents of the "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017", at the end of 2016, China reclaimed land in the three largest islands(Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef) of the SCS has completed military facilities such as military sheds and fixed weapon loading points that can hold 24 fighters. Once all are in place, China will be able to station up to 3 regiments and more than 70 fighters in the Spratly Islands.³⁶ From 2004 to 2011, China built at least 44 large dredgers. China has become the world power in reclamation and land construction.

China has constructed and militarized more than 3,200 acres of artificial islands in the SCS. China has deployed Red Flag-9 anti-aircraft missiles in the Paracel Islands, and has also deployed near-aircraft artillery on some islands and reefs in the southern Spratly Islands. In addition, larger caliber naval artillery and short-range anti-ship missiles have also been installed on some islands and reefs, and construction of

³⁴ Bonnie S. Glaser, "The U.S. Asserts Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea," CSIS, 2015/10/7, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-asserts-freedom-navigation-south-china-sea>

³⁵ These plates are Mischief Reef (6 square kilometers), Subi Reef (4.3 square kilometers) and Fiery Cross Reef (2.8 square kilometers). "Turn reefs into islands, facilities like cities, China builds 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' in the South China Sea," United News, 2019/2/4, <https://udn.com/news/story/7331/3629806>

³⁶ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," U.S. Department of Defense, 2017/5/15, pp.8-10, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF

Scarborough Shoal has begun, and frigates may be deployed. Scarborough Shoal, just 150 miles from Subic bay, forms a triangle on its artificial island in the Spratly Islands.³⁷

In recent years, China has been more active in strengthening its military deployment in the South Island Reef. New facilities that can be used for military purposes have been found in Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef in the Spratly Islands. Fiery Cross Reef has the most advanced complete facilities in the Spratly Islands. The China's navy patrol plane landed in Fiery Cross Reef in April 2016, the Yun-7 military transport plane landed in the Mischief Reef in January 2018, and the Yun-8 reappeared in Subi Reef in April 2018. It can complete landing at 3 airstrips in the Spratly Islands, and the PLA deployed the Eagle Strike 12 anti-ship missiles and the Red Flag 9B medium-to-long-range and surface-to-air missile systems on these three islands and reefs in April 2018.³⁸ The PLA officially deployed missiles in the Spratly Islands.

In addition, the Woody Island in the Paracel Islands has also greatly expanded. It is known that the area of Woody Island has increased by nearly 40%. It is estimated that the length of the airport runway increases to approximately 3,000 meters. Woody Island

is China's administrative and military center in the SCS. The PLA's military deployment in the Spratly Islands basically follows the development of the island. Woody Island has deployed J-10, J-11 fighter and H6K bomber. These fighters are likely to be deployed to other islands in the Spratly Islands in the future.³⁹ China occupies seven sites in the Spratly Islands. It has engaged in island-building and facilities-construction activities at most or all of these sites, and particularly at three of them—Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, and Mischief Reef, all of which now feature lengthy airfields as well as substantial numbers of buildings and other structures. Figure 1 shows reported military facilities at sites that China occupies in the SCS.

U.S.'s Freedom of Navigation

On the strategic and military level, the SCS is a vital passage to the US military ships to travel to the most important sites of U.S.'s influence and interests such as the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Gulf and Central Asia. Arguably, FONOPs was deemed the explicit and direct challenge of the USA against China's strategy in the SCS within the rebalance.⁴⁰ China's rising power, especially its military power will inevitably

³⁷ Charles Mabheba, "China Places Strategic Ground to Air Missile in Zimbabwe," *ZwNews*, 2018/8/9, <https://zwnews.com/china-places-strategic-surface-to-air-missiles-in-zimbabwe>.

³⁸ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative(AMTI), "A Constructive Year for Chinese Base Building," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, 2017/12/14, <https://amti.csis.org/constructive-year-chinese-buildin g/>

³⁹ "Taiwan media: PLA will deploy fighter jets in more Spratly Islands," *ETtoday*, 2018/8/2, <https://www.ettoday.net/news/20180802/1221653.htm>

⁴⁰ Danah Ali Alenezi, "US rebalance strategy to Asia and US-China rivalry in South China Sea from the perspective of the offensive realism," *Review of Economics and Political Science*, February 2020, p.back

lead to weaken the US superiority in Asia, accordingly its global hegemony. The US maritime power within rebalance is the basic to contain China.⁴¹

FONOP began in 1979, involves diplomatic activities as well as operational assertions by U.S. Navy ships, and is global in scope, encompassing activities and operations directed not only at China, but at numerous other countries around the world, including U.S. allies and partner states. FONOP was launched “to preserve the national interest in preserving the freedom of the seas and demonstrate a non-acquiescence to excessive maritime claims asserted by coastal states.”⁴² The U.S. Department of Defense’s FONOP is comprehensive in scope. The Program encompasses all of the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace available to all nations under international law. The Program is actively implemented against excessive maritime claims by coastal nations in every region of the world, based upon the Department’s global interest in mobility and access. The Program is principle-based, in that it is administered with regard to the

excessive nature of maritime claims, rather than the identity of the coastal nations asserting those claims. As a result, U.S. forces challenge excessive claims asserted not only by potential adversaries and competitors, but also by allies, partners, and other nations.⁴³

With regards to the China building artificial islands, the Trump administration continued to uphold the U.S. position of asserting the freedom of navigation in the SCS. On May 24, 2017, the U.S. conducted most recent freedom of navigation operation by deploying navy destroyer USS Dewey, and challenging the existence of an illegal territorial sea, with obvious hint being at China.⁴⁴ The record of Department of Defense(DOD) “excessive maritime claims DOD challenged through operational assertions and activities during the period of October 1, 2017, through September 30, 2018, to preserve the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all nations by international law” includes a listing for multiple challenges that were conducted to challenge Chinese claims.⁴⁵ In a November 19, 2019, speech in Manila, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper reportedly stated that the U.S. had conducted “more

⁴¹ Christopher Gan, Bert Ward, Su Ting Ting and David A. Cohen, “An empirical analysis of China’s equilibrium exchange rate: A co-integration approach,” *Journal of Asian Economics*, Vol. 29, No.C, 2013, pp.33-44.

⁴² U.S. Department of Defense, “Freedom of Navigation Program: Fact sheet,” U.S. Department of Defense, 2015/3, p.1, [http://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/gsa/cwmd/DoD%20FON%20Program%20--%20Fact%20Sheet%20\(March%202015](http://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/gsa/cwmd/DoD%20FON%20Program%20--%20Fact%20Sheet%20(March%202015)

⁴³ U.S. Department of Defense, “Freedom of Navigation Program: Fact sheet,” p.2.

⁴⁴ Eleanor Freund, *Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea: A Practical Guide*(MA: Harvard Kennedy School, 2017), p.26.

⁴⁵ Congressional Research Service, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress*(US: Congressional Research Service, 2020), p.13.

freedom of navigation operations in the past year or so than we have in the past 20-plus years.”⁴⁶ Table 1 shows reported U.S. Navy FONOPs during the Trump Administration.

After Joe Biden took office as the President of the U.S., he expressed disagreement with China's claims of sovereignty in the SCS. On February 19, 2021, the State Department stated that we reaffirm the statement of July 13th, 2020 (by then-Secretary of State Pompeo) regarding China's unlawful and excessive maritime claims in the SCS. Our position on the PRC's maritime claims remains aligned with the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal's finding that China has no lawful claim in areas it found to be in the Philippines exclusive economic zone or continental shelf. We also reject any PRC claim to waters beyond the 12 nautical mile territorial sea from islands it claims in the Spratlys. China's harassment in these areas of other claimants, state hydrocarbon exploration or fishing activity, or unilateral exploitation of those maritime resources is unlawful.⁴⁷ Biden continued the Trump administration's sovereignty in the SCS and advocated the right to freedom of navigation.

⁴⁶ Andreo Calozzo and Glen Carey, “U.S. Increased Sea Patrols to Send Message to China, Defense Secretary Says,” Bloomberg, 2019/11/19, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-19/u-s-says-increased-sea-patrols-aimed-at-china>

⁴⁷ Ned Price (Department Spokesperson), “Department Press Briefing-February 19, 2021,” U.S. Department of State, 2021/2/19, <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-february-19-2021/>

The U.S. Navy conducted its first FONOP under the new Biden administration on February 5, 2021. The February 5 FONOP by the McCain forms the first concrete data point in indicating that Biden's SCS policy is likely to be substantively similar to his predecessor's.⁴⁸ The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain carried out the FONOP near the disputed Paracel Islands in the SCS in order to uphold the right of innocent passage, including for naval vessels, in face of restrictions imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, the three countries that claim sovereignty over the islands.⁴⁹ On February 17, 2021, the USS Russell (DDG-59) cruised near Spratly Islands. This operation was directed against unlawful restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. On May 20 and July 12, 2021, USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG-54) and USS Benfold (DDG-65) also carried out FONOPs near Paracel Islands.⁵⁰

FONOP can directly support a general U.S. goal of defending the principle of freedom of the seas.⁵¹ The U.S. supports the

⁴⁸ Abhijnan Rej, “US Destroyer Conducts FONOP in South China Sea,” The Diplomacy, 2021/2/6, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/us-destroyer-conducts-fonop-in-south-china-sea/>

⁴⁹ Abhijnan Rej, “US Destroyer Conducts FONOP in South China Sea”.

⁵⁰ Congressional Research Service, U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress (US: Congressional Research Service, 2021), p.37.

⁵¹ Zack Cooper and Gregory Poling, “America's Freedom of Navigation Operations Are Lost at Sea, Far Wider Measures Are Needed to Challenge Beijing's Maritime Aggression,” Foreign Policy,

principle of freedom of the seas, meaning the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all nations in international law. The U.S. opposes claims that impinge on the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea that belong to all nations. The U.S. forces routinely conduct freedom of navigation assertions throughout the world. These operations are designed to be conducted in accordance with international law and demonstrate that the U.S. flies, sails, and operates wherever international law allows, regardless of the location of excessive maritime claims and regardless of current events.

Conclusion

The SCS has become the core of the US-China rivalry for global hegemony. China's military strategy in the SCS is based on the expansion of military power. Through cutting the Salami Slicing strategy and Cabbage Strategy, China carries out reclamation projects and builds militarized facilities in the SCS to expand its influence in the SCS and exclude US hegemonic power in Asia. In order to prevent the rise of potential hegemony (China), the U.S. adopts the strategy of balance of power to implement free navigation more frequently. It is obvious that in order to more effectively curb China's expansion of military influence in the SCS, the U.S. SCS policy is no longer

just to maintain the status quo.

From the perspective of offensive realism, analyzing China-US military competition in the SCS in the future, we can find that on one hand, China is bound to continue to expand its military strength and build militarized facilities on the South Island Reef in order to achieve national survival and achieve the Chinese dream. On the other hand, in order to prevent the rise of regional hegemony(China) and maintain the hegemonic position in the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. will also continue the power balance strategy and implement the right to freedom of navigation.

Will the China-US military confrontation lead to war or major military conflicts? From a rational point of view, security-seeking states that consider the costs and benefits and pursue the strategy most likely to ensure a state's survival, neither China nor the US actually appear to consider the costs and benefits and they do not appear to prioritize survival above all else. Foreseeing that under the rational behavior model, China and the U.S. will individually consider the costs and benefits of war or conflict. For China, stabilizing the surrounding security environment is as important as expanding power; for the U.S., preventing regional hegemony(China) from threatening its own security and power status is the main consideration. Therefore, unless the U.S. realizes that only direct military intervention can eliminate the

threats it faces and maintain the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, China and the U.S. should have no intention to cause great military unrest or war in the SCS.

However, although the possibility of war is not high, the competition between China and the U.S. in the SCS will still become an inevitable situation for the sake of national survival and hegemony. It is expected that the tense military confrontation between China and the U.S. will continue to occur. Taiwan is located in the Western Pacific and is the claimant of the SCS. As the military confrontation between China and the U.S. continues, the competition in the SCS will affect Taiwan security situation. Therefore, how to respond to the changes in the SCS will become an important issue that Taiwan government urgently needs to deal with.

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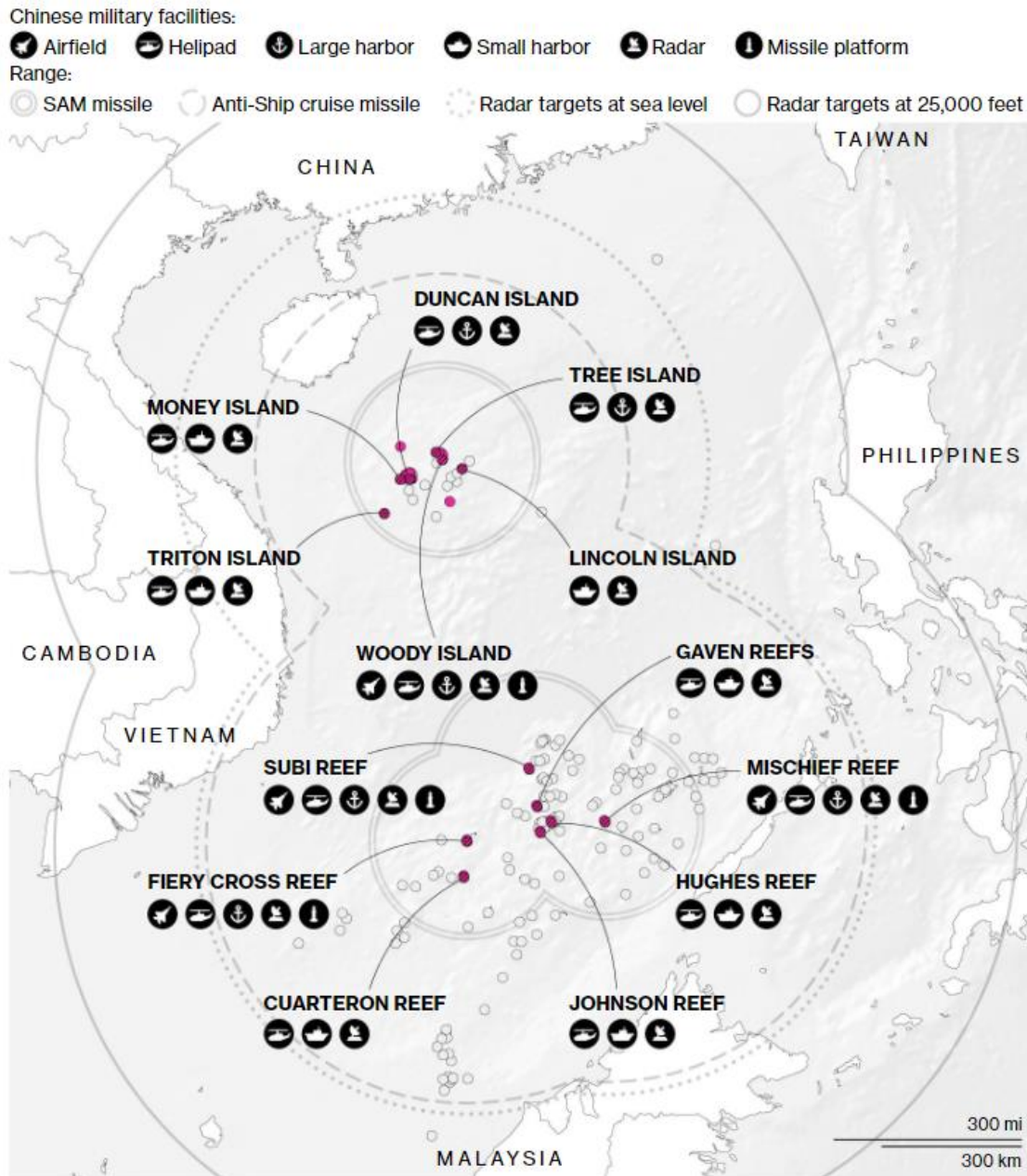


Figure 1. Reported Military Facilities at SCS Sites Occupied by China

Source: Illustration accompanying Karen Leigh, Peter Martin and Adrian Leung, "Troubled Waters: Where the U.S. and China Could Clash in the South China Sea," Bloomberg, 2020/12/17, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2020-south-china-sea-miscalculation/>

Table1. Reported FONOPs in SCS During Trump Administration

Date	Location in SCS	U.S. Navy Ship	Notes
May 25, 2017	Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	Dewey (DDG-105)	
July 2, 2017	Triton Island in Paracel Islands	Stethem (DDG-63)	
August 10, 2017	Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	John S. McCain (DDG-56)	
October 10, 2017	Paracel Islands	Chaffee (DDG-90)	
January 7, 2018	Paracel Islands	McCampbell (DDG-85)	
January 17, 2018	Scarborough Shoal	Hopper (DDG-70)	
March 23, 2018	Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	Mustin (DDG-89)	
May 27, 2018	Tree, Lincoln, Triton, and Woody islands in Paracel Islands	Antietam (CG-54) and Higgins (DDG-76)	The U.S. Navy reportedly considers that the Chinese warships sent to warn off the U.S. Navy ships maneuvered in a "safe but unprofessional" manner.
September 30, 2018	Gaven and Johnson Reefs in Spratly Islands	Decatur (DDG-73)	This operation led to a tense encounter between the Decatur and a Chinese destroyer.
November 26, 2018	Paracel Islands	Chancellorsville (CG-62)	
January 7, 2019	Tree, Lincoln, and Woody islands in Paracel Islands	McCampbell (DDG-85)	
February 11, 2019	Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	Spruance (DDG-111) and Preble (DDG-88)	
May 6, 2019	Gaven and Johnson Reefs in Spratly Islands	Preble (DDG-88) and Chung Hoon (DDG-93)	
May 19, 2019	Scarborough Shoal in Spratly Islands	Preble (DDG-88)	
August 28, 2019	Fiery Cross Reef and Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	Wayne E. Meyer (DDG-108)	
September 13, 2019	Paracel Islands	Wayne E. Meyer (DDG-108)	
November 20, 2019	Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands	Gabrielle Giffords (LCS-10)	
November 21, 2019	Paracel Islands	Wayne E. Meyer (DDG-108)	
January 25, 2020	Spratly Islands	Montgomery (LCS-8)	
March 10, 2020	Paracel Islands	McCampbell (DDG-85)	
April 28, 2020	Paracel Islands	Barry (DDG-52)	
April 29, 2020	Gaven Reef in Spratly Islands	Bunker Hill (CG-52)	
May 28, 2020	Woody Island and Pyramid Rock in Paracel Islands	Mustin (DDG-89)	
July 14, 2020	Cuarteron Reef and Fiery Cross Reef in Spratly Islands	Ralph Johnson (DDG-114)	
August 27, 2020	Paracel Islands	Mustin (DDG-89)	
October 9, 2020	Paracel Islands	John S. McCain (DDG-56)	
December 22, 2020	Spratly Islands	John S. McCain (DDG-56)	The operation was directed against excessive maritime claims by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.
December 24, 2020	Con Dao Islands	John S. McCain (DDG-56)	The operation was directed against excessive maritime claims by Vietnam. The islands, which are part of Vietnam, are located about 150 miles south of Ho Chi Minh City.

Source: Congressional Research Service, U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress(US: Congressional Research Service,2021), p.35.

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摘要

近年來，中國積極在南海填海造陸，將原有的小礁變成大島，逐步完成機場、碼頭、導彈、戰機、雷達通信系統等軍事設施的部署。2010 年以來，中國在南海島礁展開大規模填海工程，2017 年完成南海島礁軍事化，實現軍隊對南海區域的全面覆蓋。而對於中國在南海部署軍事設施，美國高度關注，並時時警告，為對抗中國在南海擴張軍力行為，美國積極實施「航行自由權」的反制措施。為瞭解中美在南海區域的競爭情勢，本文以攻擊現實主義的角度分析中美在南海的戰略考量及行動，內容包含探討攻勢現實主義的論點、分析中美的南海戰略思維、探究中國填海造陸和美國航行自由的行動，以及預測未來可能發展。

關鍵詞：南海、攻勢現實主義、填海造陸、航行自由行動

