

South China Sea Militarization: Analyzing Chinese and US Interests

Authors

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Abstract

The involvement of many claimant states in the South China Sea has made it a complex dispute and raised concerns about national security, freedom of navigation, and natural resources in the region. The strategic location of the region is one of the key factors due to which the dispute is going on among internal as well as external powers, especially the United States. The constant clashes between China and the US have deteriorated their relations. The US thinks of China as a giant competitor that can challenge the status quo in the region, while China wants to attain control over the South China Sea due to its strategic location. The interests and strategies used by them have taken the region towards militarization.

Keywords: South China Sea, National Security, Freedom of Navigation, US-China Relations, Status Quo, Militarization

Introduction

The South China Sea is a marginal sea surrounded by Mainland China, Taiwan, the Philippine Islands, the Sunda Islands, and the Indo-China Peninsula. It is part of the West Pacific Ocean. China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines are the countries and states that surround it. Hundreds of small islands, rocks, and reefs make up this area, the majority of which are found in the Paracel and Spratly Island chains.³

One of the key reasons for the disputes between China and other states in the region is the discovery of natural resources. The 2012 statistics given by China's Ministry of Land and Resources state that around 10 oil fields were discovered in the South China Sea, which covers almost half of the area.⁴

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) gave data on oil reserves of almost 11 billion barrels and natural gas reserves of approximately 190 trillion cubic feet in the South China Sea.⁵

The region has become the center of attention for major powers, especially China and the US, because of their requirements for these natural resources.

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³ Xinhui Zhong, "The Gaming Among China, The Philippines, And the US in the South China Sea Disputes" (Master Thesis, Aalborg University, 2013), p.9

⁴ Dr Abdul Ruff, "Countries back China over South China Sea dispute" *Foreign Policy News*, available at <http://foreignpolicynews.org/2016/06/14/countries-back-china-south-china-sea-dispute/>

⁵ "South China Sea" EIA Beta available at <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.php?RegionTopicID=SCS>

Apart from the discovery of these natural resources, the other thing that has made it an important region is its location, which is politically and strategically very significant. It rests between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which is the major sea route combining India, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East with East Asia. ⁶

The six Asian countries, including China, are all claimants to areas of the South China Sea (SCS). Indirectly, the United States is involved in the conflict. While China is beset by territorial disputes with its neighbors, the United States is also facing challenges from great powers such as China, Germany, Japan, and Russia. China claims ownership over a number of sea channels. The US has a stronghold in the region because of its alliances, and according to Chinese claims, the US's position in the region can be weakened. Moreover, the US considers China's policies in the South China Sea as a threat to its superpower status quo and regional hegemony.⁷

The research paper is divided into four parts. The first part gives a brief account of the actors involved in the dispute and their claims. The second part focuses primarily on the US and China's interests in the region. Moreover, the third part of the research paper mainly focuses on the militarization of the region, especially by the US and China. In the end, the paper will conclude the dispute and give some policy recommendations.

Hypothesis

The international anarchic system compels both China and the US to compete militarily against one another for power maximization in order to ensure their survival as well as facilitate their foreign policy choices. These policies and choices of the United States and China regarding the South China Sea are taking the region towards increased militarization.

Terminologies and Meanings:

Militarization: Militarization is the process by which one nation decides to become equipped with or increase its military forces or defenses.

Realism: A paradigm predicated on the idea that international politics is fundamentally and irreversibly a competition for power and status among self-interested states in anarchy, with each competing state pursuing its own national interests.

Security Dilemma: The tendency for governments to see rivals' defensive arming as menacing prompts them to arm in return, lowering overall security.

Thucydides Trap: The Thucydides Trap, often known as Thucydides' Trap, is a concept coined by American political scientist Graham T. Allison to describe an apparent proclivity for war when a new state threatens to supplant an existing great power as regional or international hegemony.

Game Theory: is a mathematical model of strategic interaction in which results are affected not just by the preferences of a single actor but also by the choices of all participants.

⁶ Zhong, "The Gaming Among China, The Philippines, And The United States: The South China Sea Disputes, p. 10

⁷ Dr Nazir Hussain and Sobeia Tabbasum, "US-China relations and the South China Sea Conflict" *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, Vol III, issue 2 (2014): p.4

Research Questions

- Why are the United States and China's strategies in the South China Sea taking the region towards militarization?
- Who are the actors involved, and what are their claims in the South China Sea dispute?
- What are the interests of the US and China in the region?
- What are the strategies used by the US and China in the area, and how are they leading toward militarization?

Literature Review:

Xinhui Zhong, in his journal article "The Gaming among China, the Philippines, and the US in the South China Sea Disputes," argues that the militarization of the SCS is because of many reasons, including Firstly, the SCS is expected to have a great potential reserve of natural resources, which can provide China with additional resources for its future energy demand. Secondly, the SCS is the most significant sea route for the transportation of oil from the Middle East and Africa to East Asia. Therefore, China has a strong urge to secure its "lifeline" to encourage its economic development. Thirdly, SCS has strategic significance for the Chinese navy to acquire more strategic depth by reaching the Pacific. With the recent expansion of its comprehensive national power, China is clearly in a stronger position when it comes to disagreements or conflicts with other countries like the Philippines and Vietnam.

The US, on the other hand, wants to keep control and leadership of the Pacific, including the SCS. The United States will not accept an ever-increasing dominance from the East and will not allow China to acquire control of the South China Sea. The United States' aim in the Asia-Pacific is to maintain a balance of power in the region as well as free navigation in the South China Sea so that no single country becomes a dominant force in the region. In recent years, the US has pursued a "Rebalancing" policy in the Asia-Pacific to achieve this goal. For example, the United States' open support for the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea issues is intended to combat China's growing dominance.⁸

In their publication "The South China Sea Dispute: Increasing Stakes and Rising Tensions," Clive Schofield and Ian Storey argue that there is a bleak prognosis of military escalation in the future if the current situation of sovereignty and resource disputes persists in the South China Sea. Such interstate friction has always had the potential to spill over into a military confrontation.⁹

The world's politics are moving towards the Indo-Pacific region, as the US Naval Document of 2007 signifies this region with an Asia pivot strategy. The Indo-Pacific region is of great significance as 80% of seaborne oil trade goes through this region, which is rich in natural resources, making it a strategic competition for world politics and more prone to military

⁸Zhong, Xinhui. "The gaming among China, the Philippines and the US in the South China Sea disputes." PhD diss., Master Thesis, Development and International Relations, Aalborg University, Denmark, 2013.

⁹ Storey, Ian. "The South China Sea Dispute: Rising Tensions, Increasing Stakes." Jamestown Foundation, 2009.

escalation due to the increased militarization seen in recent times with the clash of interests between the US and China.

To examine the militarization of the South China Sea, one needs to compare the project with Rimland theories. Rimland theory holds that seapower that has larger coastal areas is more powerful in terms of resources and military movement because of easy access to the sea. It also best explains that human geography has influenced power politics. As we can see, the world's islands, such as Europe, Africa, and Asia, are now a source of power and influence over the entire globe. For instance, the world's politics are now moving towards Asia due to its Geo-economic and geostrategic location.

Limitations of the Research

There are a few limitations while carrying out the research that should be considered. These limitations include no direct access to the foreign policymakers of the major states involved in the conflict. In addition, the research mainly focuses on the US and China's interests and strategies. There are too many actors involved.

Methodology:

This research is done through the qualitative research method. Secondary sources have been used. The secondary data was collected through different research papers, books, scholarly articles, YouTube videos, online newspapers, and theses. The articles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas and the official websites of the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) were also consulted.

Theoretical Framework:

To create the theoretical framework, the research paper incorporated two theories, i.e., Realism and Game theory, about security dilemmas and choice of strategy to explain the research questions.

The most typical theory when studying international affairs is realism. According to realists, the states are power-hungry and in continuous competition with each other to pursue their national interests, and their quest for power results in security dilemmas, mistrust, chaos, and an anarchical situation. That is why the theory is important in the context of the South China Sea, as both regional and other external powers like the US are showing their interests, which has resulted in violent conflicts in the region.

When assessing the South China Sea through the lens of the security dilemma, two things best describe the relations between claimants' states and the security dilemma amongst them: First, the very basic notion is that China, being a rising power, is causing security threats to other claimants who are comparatively less powerful, leaving them with no choice but to bandwagon with the great power, the United States. The statement can be supported by the fact that the United States is an ally of the Southeast Asian States, more specifically the Philippines and Vietnam, and has strong defense relations with both states, which are actively involved in the conflict. Also at the arbitral tribunal, the United States supported the claim of the Philippines in the South China Sea. The second is that China, which is a rising power, is causing a security dilemma for the existential power, the United States. The concept of the Thucydides Trap given

by Graham T. Allison is pertinent here, where a rising power tries to topple the existing superpower to procure global hegemony.

The conflict can be examined through the Game Theory approach, where certain players are involved. An action taken by a player results in a reaction by the other player or players. In this conflict, there are too many actors and players involved; however, China, the United States, Vietnam, and the Philippines are said to be the main players who are constantly engaging in the conflict through their changing policies and alliances. Any action taken by China can result in a reaction, either in the form of alliance building, giving the US access to their territorial waters and increasing its military presence, or vice versa, depending on the action, which is always evolving by looking at the dynamics of the region.

Why is South China Sea so Important?

The South China Sea (SCS) is a semi-enclosed sea and has been considered the most dangerous and unpredictable security hotspot in Asia's maritime domain in recent times. It covers approximately 3.5 million square kilometers of water, with Vietnam, the Philippines, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei surrounding it.

For three main reasons, the South China Sea is an important maritime zone for the mentioned countries and a number of other countries throughout the world. First, the South China Sea is a geostrategic gateway for commercial shipping, which annually moves over \$5 trillion of seaborne commodities and crude oil from the Middle East through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait to the South China Sea's surrounding countries. The South China Sea transports almost two-thirds of South Korea's energy supply, nearly 60% of Japan and Taiwan's oil imports, and roughly 80% of China's energy consumption. Keeping this important sea route open is thus in the best interests of China and the other countries in the sub-region.

Secondly, beneath the South China Sea lies an unexplored resource of hydrocarbons. So far, none of the world's technologically capable countries has been able to determine the actual amount of oil and gas that can be obtained from the South China Sea's bottoms. However, according to a 2013 report published by the US Energy Information Administration, the South China Sea can provide 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of gas. This was in contradiction to the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company's (CNOOC) estimation of 125 billion barrels of oil and 500 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Thirdly, the South China Sea is strategically important for the amount of fish that could be fished in the maritime environment. Humans rely heavily on fish for protein in their diets. Different kinds of fish, including tuna, mackerel, shrimp, and shellfish, can be fished in the South China Sea for human consumption. The South China Sea contributes to more than 10% of world fisheries productivity, according to a UN Report. For many years, the fishing industry has been a source of income for thousands of people in the coastal communities of the littoral states that surround the South China Sea, as well as a source of foreign exchange revenues for the littoral states. However, the South China Sea's fish stock is declining due to severe coastal pollution, unsustainable fishing techniques, and the devastation of the marine system. As a result, the disputant States' fishermen have little choice but to risk traveling far into the disputed waters of the South China Sea in order to capture a better catch of fish.

The Historical Claim of China over the South China Sea: (Nine-Dash-Line):

The historic claim of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is “indisputable sovereignty” over the disputed South China Sea territories, especially the Spratly Islands. China's claim to sovereignty over SCS goes back from the Han dynasty to the Qing dynasty. The decolonization process started soon after World War II, and under the Kuomintang (KMT) government, the interior minister of the Republic of China published an official map of its maritime claims in the South China Sea. First, the eleven-dash line, which was later changed into a nine-dash line by removing the two dashes between Hainan and Vietnam in the 1950s,

The chart with the U-shaped intermittent nine-dash line (jiudianxian) was kept by the People's Republic of China, and it has since been used to lay de facto claims to the islands and reefs in the South China Sea and neighboring waterways. China also included the map in a paper that it submitted to the UN Secretary-General on May 7, 2009. It was in response to the Vietnam-Malaysia joint submission and Vietnam's standalone submission to the United Nations Commission on the Boundaries of the Continental Shelf on the 6th and 7th of May, respectively, concerning the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.¹⁰

However, there is still great ambiguity over what China's nine-dash line implies. According to Wang, “The dashed lines mean the ocean, islands, and reefs all belong to China and that China has sovereign rights. But it's discontinuous, meaning that other countries can pass through the lines freely.” Other scholars, however, believe it represents a lot more.¹¹



Sino-US Geo-Strategic Rivalry over South China Sea:

The dispute over the South China Sea is unique in its own right. The geographic proximity makes it more complicated and complex for China and the neighboring claimants involved. The increased militarization of the SCS is posing a greater threat to the region's geopolitical and geoeconomic stability. China's historic claims of its indisputable sovereignty and policy of expansionism in the SCS are challenging the sovereignty of regional countries as well as US

¹⁰Ogunnoiki, Adeleke Olumide. “China as a Rising Power and Her Growing Assertiveness in the South China Sea.” *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research (IJAAR)* 4, no. 2 (2018): 156–84.

¹¹Shukla, S (2020, July 28). What is nine-dash line? The basis of China's claim to sovereignty over South China Sea. *ThePrint*. <https://theprint.in/theprint-essential/what-is-nine-dash-line-the-basis-of-chinas-claim-to-sovereignty-over-south-china-sea/469403/>

influence in the region. SCS is the trade hub and maritime transportation route for a third of global maritime trade. Huge oil and gas reservoirs are expected on its seabed. The fishing ground's capacity makes it more crucial for food security. The increased significance of SCS is because of its geo-strategic location. The US thinks of China as a strategic competitor and challenge to its regional predominance, while China sees the US and its alliances' joint military exercises in the SCS as a destabilizing factor for the US and a threat to its sovereignty and regional hegemony. Both China and the US accuse each other of undermining peace and stability in the region. China is making efforts to control geo-strategic rivalry and economic competition with the US through the Inland Sea dispute. On the other hand, the US has brought Australia, Japan, and India into a quadrilateral security dialogue to counter China's expanding influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The China containment policy of the Biden Administration has led to the formation of Quad 2.0. The new strategic partnership Quad 2.0 consists of India, the UAE, Israel, and the US. However, it is argued that the new Quad has a limited security agenda, but it seems like an encirclement policy to stop China's rise and influence.¹²

The South China Sea Dispute Background and Law Of Sea:

Background:

The South China Sea disputes are the most complex, as they involve territorial as well as maritime disputes. The area has several tiny lands that are claimed by six countries, which mainly include China and Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Brunei. The two main islands are Spratly Island and Paracel. The claims of China are the most extensive. The claims made by these states are intersectional, or we can say overlapping. Because of this the dispute has been present in the region for decades, and China is playing a major role in the dispute. The recent times, the US has also played a major role in the dispute.

The dispute has gathered worldwide attention, especially after 2009, when Vietnam and Malaysia sent a report to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. China saw these actions as a violation of the Doc's Article 5. The Document of Conduct (DoC) was an agreement signed between the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China that helped, keep the region peaceful for around seven years. In its response, China then presented its Nine-Dash Line map, claiming full sovereignty over the South Asian Region.¹³

The discoveries in the region include natural gas and the huge potential of oil storage, and because of these discoveries, the strategic political importance of the region has increased in recent times.

The Law of the Sea:

The dispute in the South China Sea (SCS) can be seen under UNCLOS III, which is the third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. All of the claimant states have ratified the

¹² Arhama Siddiq, "Quad 2.0: Why the US, UAE, India and Israel Have Joined Forces," Middle East Eye, November 5, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/us-uae-israel-india-quad-20-aligned-why>.

¹³ Lidya C. Sinaga, "China's Assertive Foreign Policy in South China Sea under Xi Jinping: Its Impact on United States and Australian Foreign Policy" *Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI), Indonesia*; p.134

treaty, but to expand their sovereign authority, they have violated it. The convention regulated territorial seas, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), internal waters, continental shelves, archipelagic waters, and the hand of the seas.¹⁴ It gives authority to extend sovereign jurisdiction to coastal states under some rules. It gives authorization for expanding the territorial sea up to 12 nautical miles while limiting the contiguous zone to 24 nautical miles. The convention states that the EEZ “shall not extend beyond the 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured.”¹⁵ The coastal states’ rights over the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) are limited only to the investigation or exploration of living and inanimate things.

The fact that Spratly Island can produce maritime zones is, however, under debate. The definition of an island as defined by UNCLOS is “a naturally formed area of land surrounded by water that is above water at high tide and is capable of supporting life naturally, whereas rocks cannot support life or human habitation. Therefore, according to these expressions of the treaty, it applies to the Spratly Islands, and according to these features, the claims made about maritime jurisdiction in the SCS may not be licit.

Main Stakeholders and Their Claims:

China’s Claim

China’s official position is that the Spratly and Paracel Islands have been an intrinsic and essential part of Chinese territory for many years. They reject the Philippines’ arbitration process and call the occupation of territories by the Philippines illegal, and thus, according to them, the treaty of the law of the sea does not apply.

Interests of Vietnam

The official position of Vietnam, following UNCLOS, is that it owns the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos and holds complete sovereignty over them, wants strict execution of the Declaration on Conduct (DOC), and wants the dispute to be settled peacefully according to international law and not by force.

Interests of Philippines

The Philippines’ official position is that the nine-dash lines by the Chinese, which say the entire SCS belongs to China, violate the law of the sea, to which both the Philippines and China are signatories. China declined the settlement invitation from the Philippines, which rejected the idea of peaceful negotiation. Therefore, the Philippines took the dispute to the Tribunal Court, but China was adamant on its claim and rejected the hearing in the Tribunal Court.

¹⁴ Ralf Emmer, “Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea: Strategic and Diplomatic Status Quo” (Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 2015)p.3

¹⁵ Article 57, 1982 Convention, *Official Text of United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea* New York: United Nations, 1983

Interests of Brunei

The official position of Brunei is that they assert claims on some part of the territory within their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), want the dispute to end with peaceful dialogues, and are not in favor of international arbitration.

Interests of Malaysia

The official position of Malaysia is that it also asserts claims on some parts of the territory within its EEZ and some of the islands in the Spratly. It wants full cooperation and dialogue with other states and is not in favor of any kind of external involvement.

Interests of Taiwan

Taiwan first claimed a U-shaped nine-dash line map in 1948. However, its claims became clear in 2005 when it claimed some features of land within that line, the continental shelf, and not the whole of the water body but some of the islands that are surrounded by water.

Interests of the US

The United States of America has no interests in territorial disputes, but their national interests are what are involved in the disputes, as they have treaties signed with the Philippines and Japan, which draw them into the conflict. They also want to preserve the status quo in the region and see China as a threat to their position in the region.

China's Interests in the Region:

“While we pursue peaceful development, we will never relinquish our legitimate rights and interests or allow China's core interests to be undermined. We should firmly uphold China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights, interests, and national unity, and properly handle territorial and island disputes.” Xi Jinping, November 2014

Almost all parts of the South China Sea are claimed by China. China has officially stated that it would not accept any kind of interference from external powers like the US in SCS and termed it their national and core interest. Their national interests are divided into three parts. The core interest is the basic one, which is meant to be survival and political interdependence.

China termed this dispute their core interest due to several reasons, among which their major concern is the energy security of the region because of the region's increasing economic development. The second reason to control the SCS is that it will give it a thoroughfare to the First Island Chain so that China's navy can acquire more strategic depth to reach out to the Pacific region.

Energy Security Interests

As China's economic development is rapidly increasing, energy security has become one of the major concerns for China's economic growth because its consumption of oil has increased rapidly and its domestic production of oil is quite low-strategic. Thus, China wants to seize and take control of the water and trade routes that have strategic importance to continue its economic growth and is willing to do it either by hook or crook using its military force.

Strategic Importance

Maritime power plays an important role in determining the nation's dominance. History has seen some examples of nations like Germany, Holland, and Spain that dominated the seas to establish

their hegemony. China has the potential to develop a maritime force in the SCS for border security, as they see the US encirclement strategy as a threat.

Regional stability is another objective of China, as it will increase its economic growth and bring prosperity. Because of the growing population of China, resource security has become a major concern, and for that reason, China has a huge interest in SCS, as it is not only rich in resources but also connects to other parts of resource-rich areas, especially Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. About 80% of the energy supplies from the South China Sea come to China.

United States Interests In The Region:

“We do not have a position on the legal merits of the competing sovereignty claims to the islands, but we do have a position under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the potential maritime claims.”¹⁶

Being a superpower, the US wants to maintain and preserve its status in the Pacific region. As China is making several sovereignty claims, the interests of the US are threatened by them. by the policies of China in the region. The United States can face challenges to its economy from China. The objectives and the policies of the US lie in the Global Common, which protects the presence of the military in the zones of basic premium.

Thus, the South China Sea is the most widely recognized zone, as its area makes it a center stage for significant economies around the world, particularly China and the US. The US also wants to contain any emerging power that challenges its authority, unipolarity, and avoidance of any kind of test. Unipolarity is one of the major policies of the United States. Therefore, the basic objective of the US is the well-being of its trade routes all over the world. So on account of the South China Sea, the basic strategy of the US lies in freedom of navigation. The US wants to dominate air, land, and oceans, but its prevalence is being compromised by China.

Strategies for Militarization of the South China Sea Region:

China’s approach regarding the dispute in the SCS is strengthening its hold in the region.

Salami-Slicing Strategy

China’s strategy and approach towards the SCS dispute are usually characterized as a “salami-slicing strategy”¹⁷ that utilizes a progression of steady activities. “Cabbage strategy” is a term used by the Chinese to wrap the disputed islands and consolidate control over them, similar to cabbage leaves in layers. Other onlookers have referred to China’s methodology as gray zone operations, in which the operations are established in hazy areas or gray zones. Another one is the “talk and take” strategy, in which China participates in exchange while taking steps to deal with disputed or challenged territories.¹⁸

¹⁶ Lidya C. Sinaga, “China’s Assertive Foreign Policy in South China Sea under Xi Jinping:Its Impact on United States and Australian Foreign Policy,” *Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI), Indonesia*; p.139

¹⁷ “China’s Actions In South And East China Seas: Implications For US Interests”, *Congressional Research Service* available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42784.pdf> p.14

¹⁸ *Ibid*,p.14

Island Building and Base Construction

The island-building and base construction in the Paracel and Spratly Islands by China caused threats to the US as it could obtain successful control over the SCS. On Spratly Island, China has occupied almost seven sites.¹⁹ It was reported in June 2018 that aircraft have landed by China in the SCS, as well as surface-to-air anti-ship missiles to its recently assembled offices in the SCS. Also, it was reported that China is trying electronic warfare resources in SCS. Chinese media reported that a Chinese pursuit and salvage transport had been positioned at Subi Reef.²⁰

Coast Guard Ships

China's coast guard ship, together with the maritime military force, is the largest maritime force in the entire Indo-Pacific region. China affirms and shields its maritime claims with its navy as well as coast guard ships. The world's largest coast guard is that of China, which has increased in recent times as new ships have been added to it. On Senkaku Island Chinese patrols frequently and are subjected to operations done to harass. China also tries to pressure the Philippine military which is comparatively small in number. China has started permanent settlements in the Paracels, which have heightened concerns for the US in particular.

Russia has always been known for its military advancements. Consequently, China, like many other countries, has installed Russian-built S-300s to further strengthen its A2/AD techniques in its complex system of air and missile systems platforms. China's defenses don't just stop there; reports claim that they may even get their hands on Russia's S-400 air defense system to armor their shields even more. While most of the countries are still only thinking of ways to deal with the land and land-based attacks, China is taking it to a completely new level by installing anti-satellite weapons to prevent the US from attempting any type of satellite communication.

Freedom of Navigation

Both China and the US have different definitions of freedom of navigation. According to the US, they have the right to send their warships into the South China Sea's disputed waters, whereas China completely disagrees with the US and says sending military ships doesn't violate freedom of navigation.²¹

Due to the different opinions of both states, they have been confronted many times. A number of incidents have been reported in which the Navy confronted China, especially in the Trump administration. According to an official, there were some encounters with China that were the most unprofessional.²²

United States military presence in Guam

To achieve its strategic objectives, the United States escalated its military actions and activities in the South China Sea. Guam is a small Pacific forces island where the United States has erected

¹⁹ "China's Actions In South And East China Seas: Implications For US Interests", *Congressional Research Service* available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42784.pdf> p.15

²⁰ Ibid, p.16

²¹ Shri Jiangta "future of South China Sea Disputes Depends on Washington", *South China Morning Post*, March 4th 2017, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2076092/future-south-china-sea-disputes-depends-washington-says>

²² Ryan Browne "US Navy Has Had 18 Unsafe or Unprofessional Encounters with China Since 2016", *CNN*, November 3, 2015. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/03/politics/navy-unsafe-encounters-china/index.html>

a variety of military bases, including coast guard, air force, and naval bases. As a result, the US uses its naval and air forces to dissuade the region.²³

It was alleged that during the months of May and June, two nuclear-capable B-52 bombers flew frequently to SCS territory from bases on Guam. They were denied by the United States because they were viewed as training missions. These military maneuvers, according to China, are a danger to China's integrity and sovereignty, and as a result, China's military capabilities in the SCS have been reduced.²⁴

Findings

The major findings of the research include:

- The sovereignty disputes over the South China Sea do not appear to be resolved in the near future.
- The United States has not itself ratified the convention (UNCLOS) and has pressed China for freedom of navigation.
- Involvement of Russia and Australia
- Australia has always been neutral over the dispute in the South China Sea and has called for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Recently, Australia has extended its support to United States. As it has a security alliance with the United States. Australia is not directly involved in the conflict, but it does have an impact due to its economic and security alliances with China and US, respectively.
- Russia has a defense alliance with Vietnam and is conducting oil and gas exploration in the SCS's region, where Vietnam claims its sovereignty, through Rosneft, a Russian energy company. Russia is growing its interest in the region due to oil and gas exploration, and its presence in the region can obscure the dynamics of the South China Sea and play a broader role in the region.

Conclusion

The dispute over the South China Sea is a complex one as it involves a number of claimant states directly as well as indirectly. All of the states have their own goals and interests in the region. It is not only rich in natural resources but also has huge strategic importance, due to which it has gained much attention around the world. In recent times, the two main active states in the region have been the United States and China. China is adamant in its nine-dash line that it holds complete sovereignty over almost all of the SCS. US involvement in the dispute is due to the threat of China becoming a huge power in the region dominated by the US; hence, the influence of the US cannot be denied. To achieve goals, China will not think before using its military capabilities. In addition, the presence of US bases in Guam, Japan, and South Korea and the continuous US military presence in the region have taken it towards militarization, which proves the research hypothesis. In this atmosphere of militarization, any action or accident can escalate into a military conflict or a standoff.

²³ "What You Need to Know about Guam, the Tiny Island Home to US bases", *The Globe and Mail*, published on 9th August, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PK9mYlnzTRU>

²⁴ Wu Zurong, "US Military Actions in the South China Sea", *China US Focus*, 14th June, 2018 available at <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/us-military-actions-in-the-south-china-sea>

Recommendations

The sovereignty disputes over the South China Sea do not appear to be resolved in the near future, and they should not be solved by any compulsion or coercion. Freedom of navigation must be allowed, according to UNCLOS. The United States has not ratified the convention and is pressuring China to commit to it. The US should first ratify the convention itself; until its ratification, US management of disputes is useless. The militarization of the region has added fuel to the fire; both states should refrain from any kind of violent conflict as the result will be very precarious.

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