

THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA  
AND POTENTIAL MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

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General Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND POTENTIAL MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES, by Captain Hieu Khac Le, 106 pages.

In 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama fully lifted the U.S. military embargo on Vietnam, marking a milestone in the relationship since the normalization between the U.S. and Vietnam in 1995. The South China Sea holds a strategic position and directly impacts to the national interests of both the U.S. and Vietnam. Recently, due to the disputes in the South China Sea, the U.S. and Vietnam have held a number of meetings and cooperative events which focus on maritime collaboration in order to protect and support shared interests of the two countries.

Vietnam and the U.S. have gradually strengthened their relationship in recent years, and military is an important area of cooperation. The two military have continuously built their interoperability such as humanitarian operations, solving war legacy operations, and arms sales. Although there are still several obstacles for an enhanced military cooperation between the two countries, a strong military partnership between the two countries should be viable for future military relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Control of the seas means security. Control of the seas means peace. Control of the seas can mean victory. The United States must control the sea if it is to protect our security.

—John F. Kennedy, Remarks aboard the USS *Kitty Hawk*

#### Overview

In the world's history, all superpower nations have tried to extend their dominance to the sea. Alfred Thayer Mahan, former president of the United States Naval War College, proposed that global supremacy tightly related to the sea power in his Sea power theory in his published *The Influence of Sea power upon History, 1660-1783* in 1890 and *The Influence of Sea power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* two years later. Those books became “the bible for many navies around the world”<sup>1</sup> In his writing, Mahan emphasized the importance of the sea in the peacetime and in wartime with an example from Great Britain's dominance in military, political, and economy from seventeenth century to nineteenth century. Based on Mahan, there are six fundamental components of sea power: (1) geographical position, (2) physical conformation, including as connected therewith, natural productions and climate, (3) Extent of territory, (4) population, (5) character of the people, and (6) character of the

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<sup>1</sup> Francis P. Sempa, “The Geopolitical Vision of Alfred Thayer Mahan,” *The Diplomat*, December 30, 2014, accessed 26 April 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/the-geopolitical-vision-of-alfred-thayer-mahan/>.

government, including therein the national institutions.<sup>2</sup> Practically, regarding to Mahan's principles of sea power, China will absolutely become a counterpoise to the U.S. in controlling the sea with its huge territory in the heart of East Asia with a long coastline, the largest population country in the world, the second biggest economy, a growing military and naval power, and a stable and ambitious government.<sup>3</sup>

Since the declaration that the South China Sea will be the "core interest" of China, and their claims of "nine-dot" territories covering a majority of the South China Sea, the tensions in the South China Sea have escalated again and there are no signs it will stop. There are significant activities that show China is willing to use its overwhelming armed forces to protect its interests. The process of militarizing islands in the South China Sea also prohibits others countries' fishermen entering from the disputed waters. This provides evidence that instead of finding a peaceful solution for the region, China prefers to abuse their military power to take advantage in this area.

In *The United States–Vietnam Joint Statement 2017*, President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc asserted that the South China Sea has strategic significance to the international community. The two countries' leaders emphasized the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the seas, and shared concern about the impacts that unlawful restrictions to those freedoms have on

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald D. Parker, "Mahan for the Twenty First Century: His Principles Still Apply to National Power" (thesis, U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2003), accessed 26 April 2018, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a526258.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Sempa, "The Geopolitical Vision of Alfred Thayer Mahan."

peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>4</sup> Also, “President Trump stressed that the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere international law allows.”<sup>5</sup>

Since the beginning of the President Trump administration, there have been various changes in the U.S. foreign policy. However, the U.S national interests in the South China Sea remain the same. According to the Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy:

Freedom of the seas, however, includes more than the mere freedom of commercial vessels to transit through international waterways. While not a defined term under international law, the Department uses “freedom of the seas” to mean all of the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace, including for military ships and aircraft, recognized under international law. Freedom of the seas is thus also essential to ensure access in the event of a crisis. Conflicts and disasters can threaten U.S. interests and those of our regional allies and partners. The Department of Defense is therefore committed to ensuring free and open maritime access to protect the stable economic order that has served all Asia-Pacific nations so well for so long, and to maintain the ability of the U.S. forces to respond as needed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Joint Statement between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” 2017, accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-united-states-america-socialist-republic-vietnam/>.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Joint Statement for Enhancing the Comprehensive Partnership between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” 2017, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/20170601-united-states-vietnam-joint-statement-2017/>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives in a Changing Environment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), accessed April 26, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA percent20A-P\\_Maritime\\_SecuritY\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA_percent20A-P_Maritime_SecuritY_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF), 2.

The rise of China and its ambition in the South China Sea shown by the nine-dot line (see figure 1), which was stated in the 2009 Notes Verbales of Chinese Government to the UN Secretary General, directly threaten this maritime strategy of the U.S:

China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof (see attached map). The above position is consistently held by the Chinese government, and is widely known by the international community.<sup>7</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, *Notes Verbales CML/17/2009*, May 7, 2009, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mysvnm33\\_09/chn\\_2009re\\_my\\_s\\_vnm\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mysvnm33_09/chn_2009re_my_s_vnm_e.pdf).

### Figure 1. China's Map Sovereignty Claims

*Source:* Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, *Notes Verbales CML/17/2009*, May 7, 2009, accessed May 18, 2018, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mysvnm33\\_09/chn\\_2009re\\_mys\\_vnm\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mysvnm33_09/chn_2009re_mys_vnm_e.pdf).

For Vietnam, maritime security plays an important role within its national security in all spheres: diplomatic, information, military, and economic. The South China Sea surrounds Vietnam in the east, south, and south west, with the coast line around 3,260 km (approximately 2,000 miles). The Vietnam's stance is repeatedly clarified by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Le Hai Binh:

First and foremost, I would like to reaffirm Viet Nam's indisputable sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos. As a coastal state in the East Sea and a party to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Viet Nam enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction in its exclusive economic zone and on the continental shelf established in accordance with the Convention.<sup>8</sup>

The escalation of unilateral decisions by China in the disputed waters raises the tensions in the region and put the Vietnam's national security at risk.

### Significance of Study

When doing research for this paper, there are numbers of articles and papers about the U.S and Vietnam interests in the South China Sea. There is no product that tries to examine why the U.S. and Vietnam have to improve their relationship and strengthen the military partnership. This study also shows the advantages for both countries when they can share the benefits in the South China Sea. The military collaboration will support

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<sup>8</sup> Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Remarks by MOFA Spokesperson Le Hai Binh on Award of the Tribunal in the Arbitration instituted by the Philippines against China," 2015, accessed April 27, 2018, [https://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt\\_baochi/pbnfn/ns151104142526](https://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns151104142526).

both countries to achieve their objectives in the region, in order to acquire their national strategies. By analyzing the obstacles in the two countries' military relationship, the research will propose the approach to mitigate these obstacles for the bilateral relationship.

### Research Questions

The primary research question is: What are the opportunities for military cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S in order to support the common interests between the two nations in the South China Sea region?

The secondary research questions are:

1. What is the importance of the South China Sea for China, US, and Vietnam?
2. What are the strategies of the U.S and Vietnam toward the South China Sea?

### Research Limitations

Even though there are various components which impacts to the U.S.-Vietnam cooperation, this research does not go further than the interior factors within the two nations and China. Also, the situation in the region has changed rapidly, so that the research will use sources no later than April 30, 2018. The author tries to cover all aspects of the problem, however, because of time constraints that the research will have some gaps when analyzing the problem and the solution for it. Furthermore, this research uses open source literature only. Classified material will not be included.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will clarify the main sources which this research uses to examine the issues. This research sought sources that can provide an understanding of the aspects leading to the South China Sea becoming a strategic area affecting international interests and also maintaining potential conflicts. Besides that, the research also analyzes some sources that provide for the readers the overview of the legitimacy of territorial claims in the South China Sea of some parties involve in the regional disputes. Furthermore, seeking to answer the primary question, which is the potential military cooperation between the U.S. and Vietnam in order to support their common interests, the author will analyze documents from both the U.S. and Vietnam sides such as the bilateral documents to clarify the common interests of both sides in the South China Sea. From there, the author will anticipate and recommend the military cooperation between two countries based on the process of tightening the relationship between two countries and the obstacles that hinder this tie.

When looking at the history of conflict and the legitimacy of territorial claims between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea, the research uses *United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea* (UNCLOS) as the main source to examine the legality of governing and using the ocean and its resources. All the parties involved in the South China Sea disputes except the U.S. are members of the UNCLOS. The UNCLOS determines the rights and the responsibilities of the members to the use of the oceans in the world, establish the guidelines for the members in business, protect the environment,



manage the sea resources, and the settlement of disputes relating to ocean matters.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the UNCLOS, another document which set up the framework for the involved parties in the disputed the South China Sea is the *2002 Declaration of Conduct (DOC)*. The 2002 DOC was signed by the governments of the member states of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the government of the People's Republic of China, in order to restrain and manage the disputes in the South China Sea, based on the international laws, agreements, and principles that are recognized internationally. DOC also acknowledges the freedom of navigation and overflight of the South China Sea, which was indicated in the UNCLOS 1982 and in the international law. Moreover, the Parties concerned to not conduct unilateral activities which complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability in the region.

Another source which the author used to examine the legitimacy of territories claims is a paper titled "China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea" by Raul (Pete) Pedrozo. It is a significant source which provides significant amounts of evidence claiming the South China Sea's territory from both China and Vietnam. From this evidence, he analyzed the legitimacy of these evidences based on international laws. His paper focused on the territories claiming legitimacy; however, he did not provide any options to any parties in halting the tensions in the region, or analyze any strategies to solve the disputes in the region. Beside that paper, another source the

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982: Overview and Full Text*, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, 2018, accessed May 5, 2018, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_overview\\_convention.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm).

author used to clarify the legitimacy of the claims in the South China Sea is a report of Clarence J. Bouchat named “The Paracel Islands and U.S. Interests and Approaches in the South China Sea.”<sup>10</sup> The main points which the report indicates in its content are the importance of the Paracel islands, the legal basis and claims in the Paracel islands disputes, and the U.S. interests and responses to the issues around the South China Sea region. Clarence mentioned the importance of the South China Sea and the Paracel islands to the region and to the U.S. in economic and security. The reactions to the issues of the disputants and the U.S. indicate the trends of the relations of two powers, which can impact the rest of the world. The report provides rich historic evidence of both China and Vietnam under the customary law of discovery and occupation. On the other hand, the report also uses the UNCLOS to examine the legitimacy of claims to the Paracels. Not only pointing out the China and Vietnam perspectives, the reports quote the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) on behalf of the U.S. position on this issue is all the claims must be in accordance with the UNCLOS. The report discusses and defines how the maritime jurisdiction is determined based on international law, and from this background analyzes the U.S. interests and responses to the issues around the South China Sea region.

Not only Clarence J. Bouchat discusses the important of the South China Sea, many other studies and analysis provide information about the strategic position and the

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<sup>10</sup> Clarence J. Bouchat, *The Paracel Islands and U.S. Interests and Approaches in the South China Sea* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and United States Army War College Press, June 2014).

impact of the South China Sea to international security. When doing research about the importance of the South China Sea from economic and military perspectives, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is the main source that provide numerous of researches and analysis about the contribution of the South China Sea to the development and security of the relevant nations. First, with the trade transits through the South China Sea, the article “How much trade transits the South China Sea” and its data sources provide an overview of the significance of the South China Sea to the world’s economy, and the contribution of this trade route through the South China Sea to the economies of many countries not only share borders with the South China Sea but also have indirect benefits with it.

Besides the article above, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) provides various informative articles and analysis of the impact of the South China Sea to the energy security globally. From analyzing information from EIA, the research shows that maintaining the South China Sea freedom of navigation is critical to regional energy securities. Countries in the South China Sea region also play a key role in supporting the U.S. and Vietnam interests, in contrast to the rising influence and monopoly of China in the region. Another source contributes to the research in analyzing the importance of the South China Sea in economic is Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This organization provides information about the food security and contribution of economic activities in the South China Sea to the national GDPs of the countries in the region. The food security and the economic activities in the South China Sea will directly influence if there is a conflict in the disputed water.

On the other hand, when analyzing the military factor of the South China Sea, there are various sources which the research uses to frame the problems and get a full understanding of the strategic position of the South China Sea. The CSIS is one of the sources that the research used to identify how the South China Sea played an important role in national security of many countries in the region, also for the U.S. in maintaining the only global superpower. CSIS provides numerous studies about the military aspects of the South China Sea which give the readers a full spectrum view of the operational environment in the region. From military perspective, Clarence J. Bouchat in his research “The Paracel Islands and U.S. Interests and Approaches in the South China Sea” indicates the role and strategic position of the South China Sea to the regional and national security of China, Vietnam, and the countries in the region. Because of that, the South China Sea always is a potential conflict point which can bring the instability and insecurity to the region. Another research whose aim is to analyze the military implications of the South China Sea and its islands is “A “Great Wall of Sand” in the South China Sea? Political, Legal, and Military Aspects of the Island Dispute” by Michal Paul.<sup>11</sup> This research covers the territorial conflicts issues in the South China Sea, the recent China’s activities escalating the tensions in the region and its strategy to do so, and the political and military implications of the Chinese outposts in the South China Sea. The author through this research provides an understanding why China, vis-à-vis their national interests is, trying to have a “Great Wall of Sand” in the South China Sea.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Paul, *A ‘Great Wall of Sand’ in the South China Sea? Political, Legal, and Military Aspects of the Island Dispute* (Berlin, Germany: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2016).

Besides those sources, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative features and analysis help the author to frame the current situation in the South China Sea, providing different views and analysis from various standpoints.

Chinese strategy towards the South China Sea is clearly defined in its national strategies. In *China's Military Strategy 2015*,<sup>12</sup> successful control and influence over the South China Sea was mentioned as one of the strategic tasks in order to pursue the Chinese dream of a great nation. China reaffirmed its legitimacy in the South China Sea claims, and criticized other nations who meddle in the South China Sea. Another source where we can see how China prepares for acquiring the Chinese dream of great nation is the *U.S Department of Defense Annual Report to Congress about the Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017*.<sup>13</sup> The report provides information about China's strategy and their military approaches to achieve their goals. The report summarizes the military reformation trend in recent years of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) organization, doctrine, structure, and capabilities. The report also indicates the expansion of China in asserting the sovereignty claims over features in the South China Sea and the infrastructure construction in the South China Sea. Moreover, since the mid-1990s, China's strategy for managing its

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<sup>12</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015, accessed May 5, 2018, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content\\_4586805.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm)

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017, accessed May 5, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF).

claims in the South China Sea has not changed. China's Strategy in the South China Sea by M. Taylor Fravel examines China's behavior in the disputes in the region through the lens of its strategy for managing its claims.<sup>14</sup> The article identifies the Chinese strategy in consolidating China's claims and deterring other states from strengthening their claims in the disputed area. By analyzing China's interests in the South China Sea, and comparing China's past and current approaches to managing its South China Sea claims through diplomatic, administrative, and military means, M. Taylor Fravel concludes the factors that influence China's strategy towards the South China Sea.

When trying to understand the U.S. national interests and how maintenance of the U.S. presence in the South China Sea supports them, the primary sources to analyze are the *U.S. National Security Strategy 2017*, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, and *National Military Strategy 2015*. These documents are the fundamental sources to understand the national objectives and interests of the U.S., and the strategy of the U.S. in order to achieve these goals. These national documents defining four strategic aspects: current state, future state, problems, and approaches.

The *2017 National Security Strategy* (NSS) identifies U.S. national interests, and the way to achieve them. The NSS frames the pillars in the U.S. strategy currently and in the future. It identifies the threat and the U.S. priorities to maintain U.S. leadership in the world, and the priority actions must be executed to achieve those pillars. Specifically to the Indo-Pacific region, this document clearly identifies China as an actor that challenges U.S. power, influence, and interests. Chinese "economic inducements and penalties,

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<sup>14</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 3 (2011): 292.

influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda”<sup>15</sup> limits the U.S. access to the region and destabilizes the regional order. Parallel with the provided situation, NSS suggests the political, economic, military, and security actions in order to mitigate the risks to the interests of America. The NSS also indicates that the U.S. wants to strengthen the relationship in all spheres with the U.S. allies and partners in the region to facilitate the region’s security, stability, and prosperity.

On the other hand, the summary of the *2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) “acknowledged the increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order and the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations.”<sup>16</sup> The 2018 NDS recognizes China and Russia as the principle adversaries to the U.S. interests, which includes homeland security. The 2018 NDS notes that the balance of power remains in the U.S. favor, and the international order that is most conducive to the U.S. security and prosperity. The NDS clearly states that the priority of the Department of Defense is Asia-Pacific and Europe region, in confronting China and Russia, China was mentioned to be the first

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 46, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,” 2018, 2, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

among equals.<sup>17</sup> To achieve the defense objectives, which include eleven points mentioned in the document, the NDS draws the strategic approach compound of the integration of “multiple elements of national power-diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military.”<sup>18</sup> The essential tasks for the Department of Defense indicated in the 2018 NDS are to build a more lethal force, strengthen alliances and attract new partners, and reform the department for greater performance and affordability. In the second point, expanding Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships was mentioned first, with the purpose of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains. Those purposes are ambiguous, but they challenge the Chinese desires in the region.

The *2015 National Military Strategy* (NMS) criticized China’s actions in adding tensions to the Asia-Pacific region, claiming the illegal nine-dotted area in the South China Sea, and aggressively pushing land reclamation efforts that will favor to China in positioning military forces aim to control the vital international sea lanes and the resources in the South China Sea. By presenting the U.S. military forces in key locations, placing most advanced capabilities and greater capacity in the vital Asia-Pacific region, the U.S wants to rebalance this strategic theater, maintain international order under its

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



influence, and provide capabilities to respond to crises and engagements.<sup>19</sup> The 2015 NMS identifies the importance of deepening the security relationships and partnership with U.S. alliances and partners in order to maintain regional peace and build capabilities to provide for missile defense, cyber security, maritime security.

Based on the national strategies above, there has been much analysis on the U.S. strategies and policies towards the South China Sea. However, two main resources for this study that frame the understanding of U.S. policies towards the South China Sea are “The Paracel Islands and U.S. Interests and Approaches in the South China Sea”<sup>20</sup> and “U.S. Land Power in the South China Sea”<sup>21</sup> by Clarence J. Bouchat from U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. These studies analyze U.S. interests and how the U.S. respond to issues in the South China Sea region. Also, these studies address how the U.S. uses its military power in support to the U.S. interests in the region.

From Vietnam’s perspective, managing the disputes in the South China Sea is always a crucial issue that is mentioned in their national strategy. As a one-party state, the party’s resolution, which issued by the National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (NCCP), is the highest document that leads all other strategies of Vietnam. In the XII NCCP, the South China Sea disputes were mentioned as a critical issue that

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<sup>19</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 9, accessed May 5, 2018, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Bouchat, *The Paracel Islands and U.S. Interests and Approaches in the South China Sea*.

<sup>21</sup> Clarence J. Bouchat, *U.S. Landpower in the South China Sea* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and United States Army War College Press, July 2017).

impacts to the Vietnam's national security during the 2011-2015 period.<sup>22</sup> The 2016 Resolution recognizes the Asia-Pacific region, includes the Southeast Asia, has a very important geopolitical-economic position internationally. Also, this area will be the region where the global powers try to gain their influences. Because of that, one of the central tasks is protecting national independence, sovereignty, and territory in order to develop the country and broadening, tightening, and deepening the relationships globally, based on equivalent, shared interests, and not prejudice others.

Behind the resolution of the NCCP, there is the *Vietnamese Maritime Strategy until 2020*, which was developed by NCCP, focuses towards the maritime security.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the strategy indicates that Vietnam's will be an oceanic country in the future. To do that, the developing process must ensure the national security, international relationships, and environmental preservation. Vietnam will be more open to collaborate with the international community, based on international laws and the win-win-win of all participants. As mentioned in the *Vietnam's Diplomacy 2015*,<sup>24</sup> instability and insecurity remain an issue around the world in the near future. Sovereignty and territory violations still occur in many regions. Many states are using their superiorities to dictate to other

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<sup>22</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam, *Resolution of the XII National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam*, 2016, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://dangcongsan.vn/xay-dung-dang/ngghi-quyet-dai-hoi-dai-bieu-toan-quoc-lan-thu-xii-cua-dang-368870.html>.

<sup>23</sup> X National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, *Vietnam's Maritime National Strategy until 2020*, 2007, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://moj.gov.vn/qt/tintuc/Pages/thong-tin-khac.aspx?ItemID=1483>.

<sup>24</sup> Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Vietnam's Diplomacy 2015," 2016, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://baoquocte.vn/bao-in/sach-xanh-ngoai-giao-viet-nam-2015.paper>.

weaker states in the disputed issues. The Asia-Pacific, the Southeast Asia, and the South China Sea are important region globally, and inherently maintain the potential for conflict. Because of that, the strategy of Vietnam is to secure the ultimate national interests and further the relationships with partners and major powers who have important roles in the development and security of Vietnam, defend firmly the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the country.<sup>25</sup>

The relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam has never been warmer than in recent years. The two countries found the common interests and potential strategic partnership in each other. Since the normalization of relations in 1995, the partnership has continuously developed and led to fully lifting the long-standing ban on lethal-arms sale to Vietnam in May 2016.<sup>26</sup> The decision to lift the ban demonstrates deepening U.S.-Vietnam relations, responds to the growing tensions in the region, and the tightening of military ties between two countries. From 2015 to 2017, there were four official visits of the two countries' head of states. The Joint Statements between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in those visits set the framework for the partnership between two countries. Statements from both governments continuously reaffirm the partnership between two countries, the shared interests, and emphasize the opportunities lie ahead for U.S.-Vietnam relations, which some of the main are political, diplomatic, economic, and national defense and security. Also, the regional issues are

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<sup>25</sup> Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Vietnam's Diplomacy 2015," 79.

<sup>26</sup> Jim Garamone, "Lifting Embargo Allows Closer U.S., Vietnam Cooperation, Obama, Carter Say," U.S. Department of Defense, May 24 2016, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/779762/lifting-embargo-allows-closer-us-vietnam-cooperation-obama-carter-say/>.

always brought out, and the tension in the South China Sea is one of them. The leaders of two countries agreed to peaceful resolution of disputes, based on international law, and called for refraining from actions that could escalate tensions, such as the militarization of disputed features.<sup>27</sup>

For the military cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S, the *U.S.-Vietnam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations* (2015) is the highest level document which frames the military engagement between the U.S. and Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> This document lays out the groundwork for the defense relationship. It covers a wide range of issues including defense, trade, training, education, and exchange of information. Within those, the statement emphasized collaboration on maritime security and maritime domain awareness in order to maintain security and stability within each country and the region and defending international law and principles.<sup>29</sup> President Barack Obama announced the full lifting of the lethal arms sales restrictions on Vietnam in 2016 marked a stepping stone for a further relations between the two countries, as well as the defense ties between

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<sup>27</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Joint Statement between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” May 23, 2016, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/23/joint-statement-between-united-states-america-and-socialist-republic>; Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Joint Statement for Enhancing the Comprehensive Partnership between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam;” Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Joint Statement between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” 2016.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Viet Nam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” June 1, 2015, accessed May 15, 2018, [https://photos.state.gov/libraries/vietnam/8621/pdf-forms/usvn\\_defense\\_relations\\_jvs2015.pdf](https://photos.state.gov/libraries/vietnam/8621/pdf-forms/usvn_defense_relations_jvs2015.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the two armed forces. The development of the defense relations between two countries, demonstrates that the comprehensive partnership between U.S. and Vietnam will be more deepened, tightened in the near future, in order to support to both countries' national interests.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs the qualitative research method to collect evidence and systematically uses a predefined set of procedures in order to answer the thesis's primary and secondary questions. The thesis uses Army Design Methodology (ADM) to frame the environment, problems, and solutions for the South China Sea issues. The ADM helps commanders and planners to apply critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe unfamiliar problems and approaches to solving them.<sup>30</sup> The ADM helps avoid misunderstanding of the environment or the unimaginative and routine application of well-worn solutions that often do not fit the unique characteristics of each new situation. First, ADM helps planners understand the current state of an operational environment, then project how this environment may trend and discern desired future states of other actors and envision a desired end state. After that, by framing problem ADM helps analyze the issues or obstacles that deter the achievement of the desired objectives. Finally, the ADM will develop an operational approach to transform current conditions into desired end states.<sup>31</sup> By using the ADM methodology, the thesis will frame the major factors that impact to the South China Sea disputes and figure out the obstacles that deter the U.S. and Vietnam to achieve their common goals in the region.

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<sup>30</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2015), 1-3.

<sup>31</sup> MAJ Raymond M. Longabaugh, "Explaining the Army Design Methodology," July 19, 2013, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2014/Oct-Mar/Longabaugh.html>.

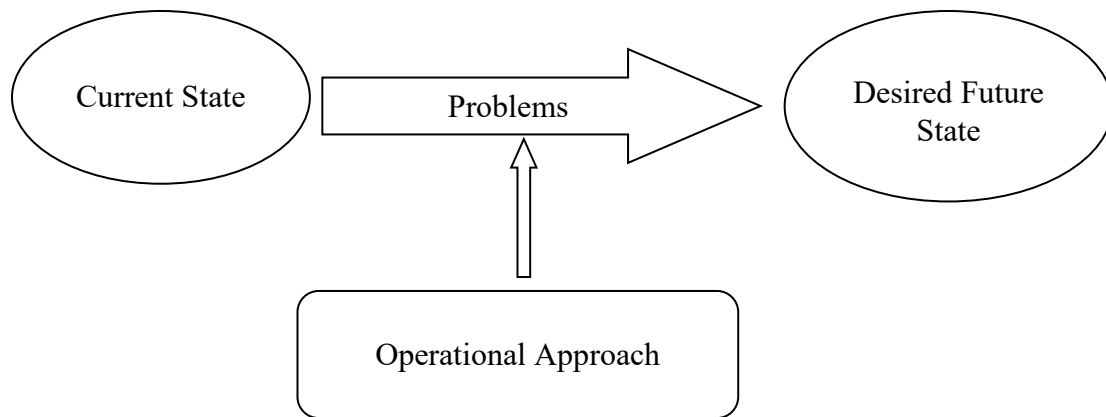


Figure 2. Operational Approach

*Source:* Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2015), 5-1.

When trying to examine common interests of the U.S. and Vietnam in the region, the thesis will analyze the impact of the South China Sea in terms of two of the instruments of national power, military and economic. In the *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*-Joint Publication (JP) 1,<sup>32</sup> the ability to advance national interests is dependent on the effectiveness of the government in employing the instruments of national power, which include diplomacy, information, military, and economic, to achieve national strategic objectives. The South China Sea is one of the key geopolitical areas because of the regional economic development and the rising tensions can lead to the destabilization, which includes China, the second largest economy in the

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<sup>32</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, incorporating Change 1 – 12 July 2017), I-12, accessed April 27, 2018, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1\\_ch1.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf).

world and one of the military power who are trying to extend its influence across the world.

To identify the potential military relationship between Vietnam and the U.S, the research will use seven elements of negotiations to identify common interests, legitimacy, relationships, alternatives, options, commitments, and communications to analyze the possibility and areas of collaboration between two armed forces. Seven elements of negotiations define a set of core variables or elements of negotiation to help forming a framework the negotiation's progress. Also, these elements help the negotiators preparing effectively to avoid surprises or unfavorable conditions, also identify and take advantages of opportunity. Furthermore, these elements provide a path to assist when the negotiators make their decisions, and the way to achieve their goals.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bruce Patton, "Negotiation," in *The Handbook of Dispute Resolution*, ed. Michael L. Moffitt and Robert C. Bordone (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), accessed May 7, 2018, [https://www.vantagepartners.com/uploadedFiles/Consulting/Research\\_And\\_Publications/Smart\\_Form\\_Content/Publications/Articles/Negotiation.pdf](https://www.vantagepartners.com/uploadedFiles/Consulting/Research_And_Publications/Smart_Form_Content/Publications/Articles/Negotiation.pdf), 279-303.



CHAPTER 4  
NATIONAL INTERESTS ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES  
AND VIETNAM IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA REGION

In recent years, the South China Sea has been a continually disputed area in the Pacific. Military exercises, construction, and militarizing islands are Chinese activities that have escalated the tensions in the region. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the South China Sea was limited to disputes between the parties who share the boundaries with it about the sovereignty claims to the islands and portion of waters with the resources under it. On the contrary, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the South China Sea escalates to a new level of conflict when China illegally claims, reconstructs, and militarizes the islands within the disputed waters, and unilaterally established policies that forbid the rights of other nations to access, overflight, and exercise legal economic activities in the water. These reconstructed militarized islands have strategically geographic importance in national security to all the nations in the region.

With the involvement of other nations outside the region, the South China Sea conflict becomes internationally recognized. The unresolved problems extend beyond sovereignty claims, but also include the exploitation of the sea, maritime security, diplomacy, etc. In this situation, the involvement of the U.S. leverages the smaller nations in the region from the overwhelming power of China, in order to maintain the security, stability, and the interests of all other nations to confront a rising China.

## The Importance of the South China Sea

The U.S. and Vietnam share common interests in maintaining the South China Sea region as stable, secure, and prosperous. The South China Sea plays a crucial role to the security of the countries in the region for diplomatic, information, military, and economic power. The South China Sea is located west of the Pacific Ocean and includes critical world trade routes, a potential rich source of natural gas, oil, and important fishing grounds. Moreover, the South China Sea plays an important role in geopolitical location for the nations with borders on it. Stretching from Singapore and Strait of Malacca in the southwest to the Strait of Taiwan in the northeast, the South China Sea covers China, Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The area of the South China Sea is approximately 3.5 million kilometers square, stretching from 3<sup>0</sup> north latitude to 26<sup>0</sup> north latitude, from 100<sup>0</sup> east longitude to 121<sup>0</sup> east longitude (See figure 3).<sup>34</sup>

As described by Robert Kaplan, “The South China Sea functions as the throat of the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans” – the connective economic tissue where global sea routes converge. More than half of the world’s annual merchant fleet tonnage and a third of all maritime traffic worldwide passes through the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, and Makassar with the majority continuing on to the South China Sea. Almost a third of global crude oil and over half of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade passes through the South China Sea each year, making it one of the most important trade routes

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<sup>34</sup> Trần Bông, “South China Sea: Geopolitic and Economic Potentiality,” December 29, 2009, accessed April 28, 2018, <http://nghiencuubiendong.vn/tong-quan-ve-bien-dong/504-bien-ong-ia-chien-lc-va-tiem-nng>.

in the world (See figure 4, figure 5, and figure 6).<sup>35</sup> For the big economic nations in this area such as China, Japan, and Korea, the South China Sea has the crucial role in their national securities. Roughly two-thirds of South Korea's energy supplies, nearly 60 percent of Japan's and Taiwan's energy supplies, and 80 percent of China's crude oil imports come through the South China Sea.<sup>36</sup> In 2016, trade value through the South China Sea was approximately 3.4 trillion dollars, in which China contributed 1,470 billion dollars, Japan contributed 240 billion dollars, and United States contributed 208 billion dollars.<sup>37</sup> A conflict in the South China Sea could lead to the disruption of this maritime trade route and cause a global economic crisis. Especially for China, maintaining its influence in the South China Sea is one of the critical capabilities, which supports China's center of gravity of dominating the world's market. The South China Sea becomes a Chinese critical vulnerability, such that if it lost the control of the region to another major power, the consequence will be the obvious risk to the Chinese economy.

The South China Sea contains rich resources for economic development of the surrounding countries, especially for fishing and aquaculture economics, natural resources, and tourism. The fishing and aquaculture industry is critically important to the

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<sup>35</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific," *Business Insider*, January 6, 2015, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/why-the-south-china-sea-is-so-crucial-2015-2>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies-China Power Project, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea," August 2, 2017, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

food security, local economic development, and fisherman living income. Many countries in the region have a strong aquaculture economy, and a large portion of their population depends on the aquaculture such as China, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. China has 14 million fishermen and fish farmers, while Indonesia has six million, and their living depends on the fishery industry.<sup>38</sup> China has the largest fishing industry in the world with the 2014 marine capture production of approximately 14.8 million tons, representing about 20 percent of the total marine capture production of the world. For the live fish catch in 2014, of the top 15 major marine producers in the world, five countries shared the South China Sea fishing ground (See table 1).<sup>39</sup> China and Vietnam hold the first and the third place of the top ten exporters of fish and fishery products in 2014.<sup>40</sup> China has the largest fishing fleet in the world with nearly 200,000 marine fishing vessels and 2,460 distant water fishing vessels in 2014.<sup>41</sup> This industry generates 20.98 billion dollars for China, 8.03 billion dollars for Vietnam in 2014, providing good lives for their fishermen and people who work in their fishing industry.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016 - Contributing to Food Security and Nutrition for All*, Food and Agriculture Organization, 2016, 34, accessed May 6, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>41</sup> Zhang Hongzhou, *China's Fishing Industry: Current Status, Government Policies, and Future Prospect* (Arlington, VA: CNA Conference Facility, July 2015), 1, accessed May 6, 2018, [https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/China-Fishing-Industry.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/China-Fishing-Industry.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016 - Contributing to Food Security and Nutrition for All*, 53.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Production (millions of tons)</b>	<b>Percent of the World</b>
1	China	14.8	17.40
2	Indonesia	6.0	6.80
3	United States	4.9	6.41
4	Peru	4.8	6.03
5	Russia	4.0	5.10
6	Japan	3.6	4.53
7	India	3.4	4.27
8	Chile	3.4	3.23
9	Vietnam	2.7	3.03
10	Myanmar	2.7	2.93
11	Norway	2.3	2.70
12	Philippines	2.1	2.67
13	South Korea	1.7	2.08
14	Thailand	1.6	2.02
15	Malaysia	1.5	1.85
World Total		81.5	100.00

Source: United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture: Opportunities and Challenges*, Food and Agriculture Organization, 2016, accessed April 27, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf>.

On the other hand, based on the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the South China Sea has proven or probable reserves of 11.2 billion barrels of crude oil, and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves, and a similar amount that exist as undiscovered resources (See figure 7).<sup>43</sup> For the second largest oil consumer and the third largest dry natural gas consumption country as China, with the consumption amount of

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Contested Areas of South China Sea Likely Have Few Conventional Oil and Gas Resources,” 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=10651>.

12 million refined petroleum barrels per day, and 6,575 billion cubic feet dry natural gas per year (in 2015 estimate),<sup>44</sup> the oil and gas resources in the South China Sea are critical for its energy security. For Vietnam, oil is the largest foreign currency earning product, making up to more than 30 percent of its GDP. The Vietnamese “White Tiger” oilfield alone produced more than 20 million tons of crude oil and generated 25 billion US dollars contributed to its GDP.<sup>45</sup>

The South China Sea is also geographically critical for national security of countries in the region. For China and Vietnam, controlling the islands in the South China Sea can create a robust defense in depth, which can deny the threat before it reaches to the mainland. China can establish the air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea, as they did in 2013 in the East China Sea. This ADIZ can deny the right to freedom of overflight in the international airspace, hinder the other nation’s operating capabilities within or over the zone. Base on Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative update in June 29, 2017, China continues to construct military facilities including new missile shelters, radar/communications facilities, and other infrastructures on Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi Reefs (See figure 8).<sup>46</sup> These facilities and infrastructures will allow

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<sup>44</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Total Petroleum and Other Liquids Production – 2017,” accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/index.cfm?view=consumption>.

<sup>45</sup> Li Guoqiang, “South China Sea Oil and Gas Resources,” China Institute of International Studies, May 2015, accessed April 27, 2018, [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content\\_7894391.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content_7894391.htm).

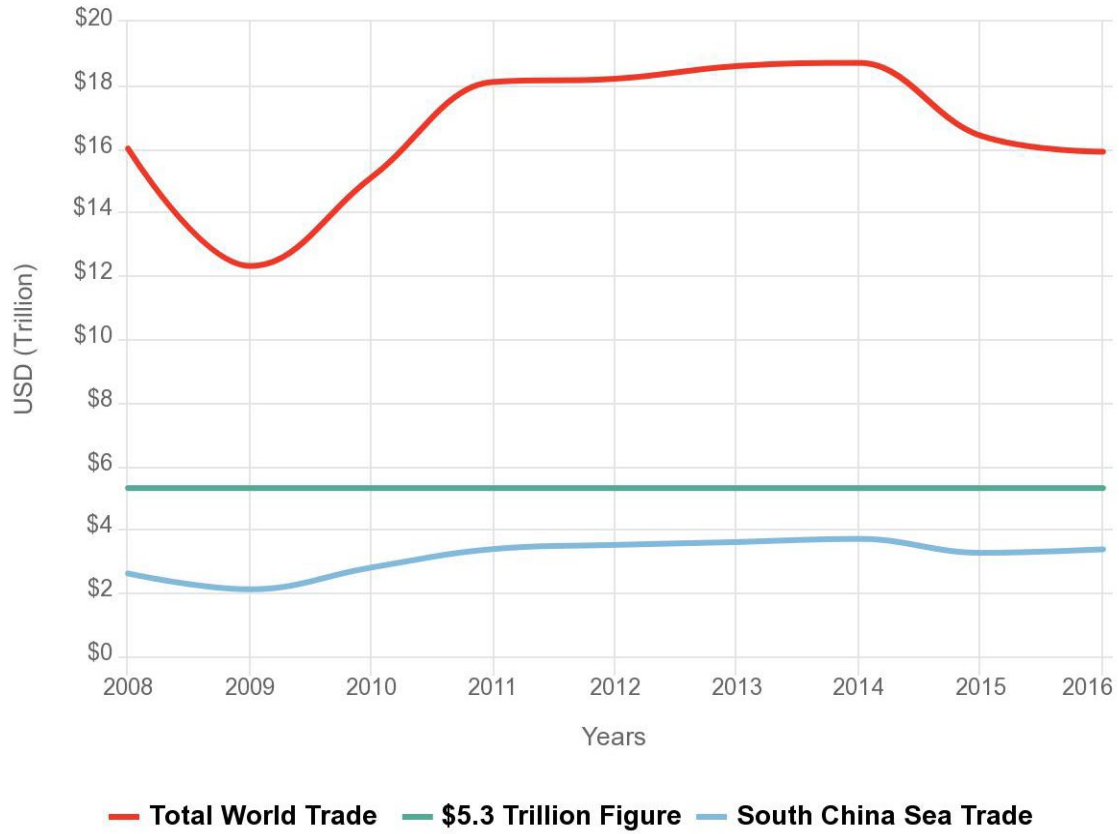
<sup>46</sup> The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative and The Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Updated: China’s Big Three Near Completion,” June 2017, accessed November 17, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-big-three-near-completion/>.

greater China's control in the South China Sea, exercise its de facto control over the Parcel Islands and part of Spratly Islands, threaten the freedom of navigation and overflight in the international water and airspace, which are U.S. national interests mentioned in the NDS. Moreover, China's outposts in the South China Sea provide sustainment facilities for Chinese aircraft, ships, and submarines to resupply and enhance its rapid reaction capability when conflicts occur in the region.



Figure 3. Map of the South China Sea

*Source:* U.S. Energy Information Administration, “South China Sea,” February 7, 2013, accessed May 18, 2018, [https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis\\_includes/regions\\_of\\_interest/South\\_China\\_Sea/south\\_china\\_sea.pdf](https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/regions_of_interest/South_China_Sea/south_china_sea.pdf).



CSIS China Power Project | Source: International Monetary Fund, Direction of Trade Statistics; ChinaPower

Figure 4. The South China Sea Trade Versus World Trade

Source: China Power Team, “How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?” Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 2, 2017, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.



Major crude oil trade flows in the South China Sea (2011)  
million barrels per day

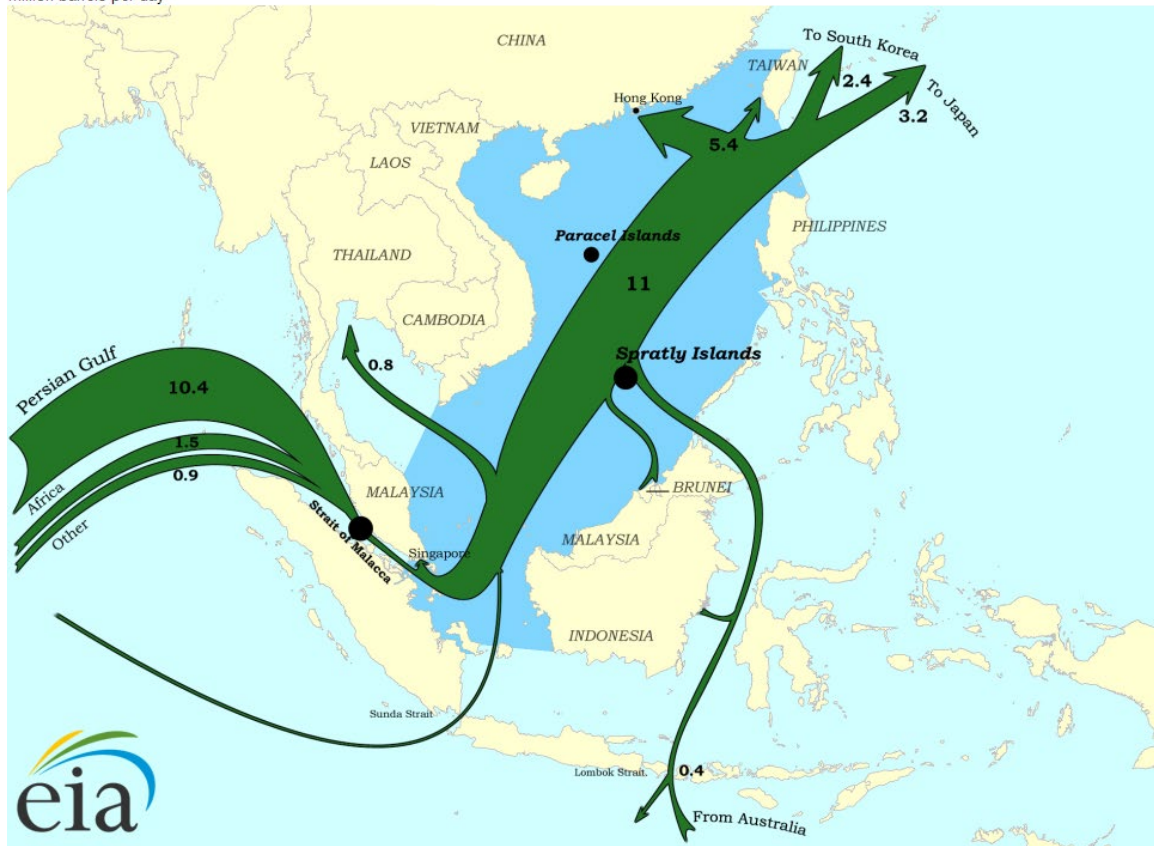


Figure 5. Major Crude Oil Trade Flows in the South China Sea (2011)

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “The South China Sea is an Important World Energy Trade Route,” April 4, 2013, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=10671>.

Major LNG trade flows in the South China Sea (2011)  
trillion cubic feet

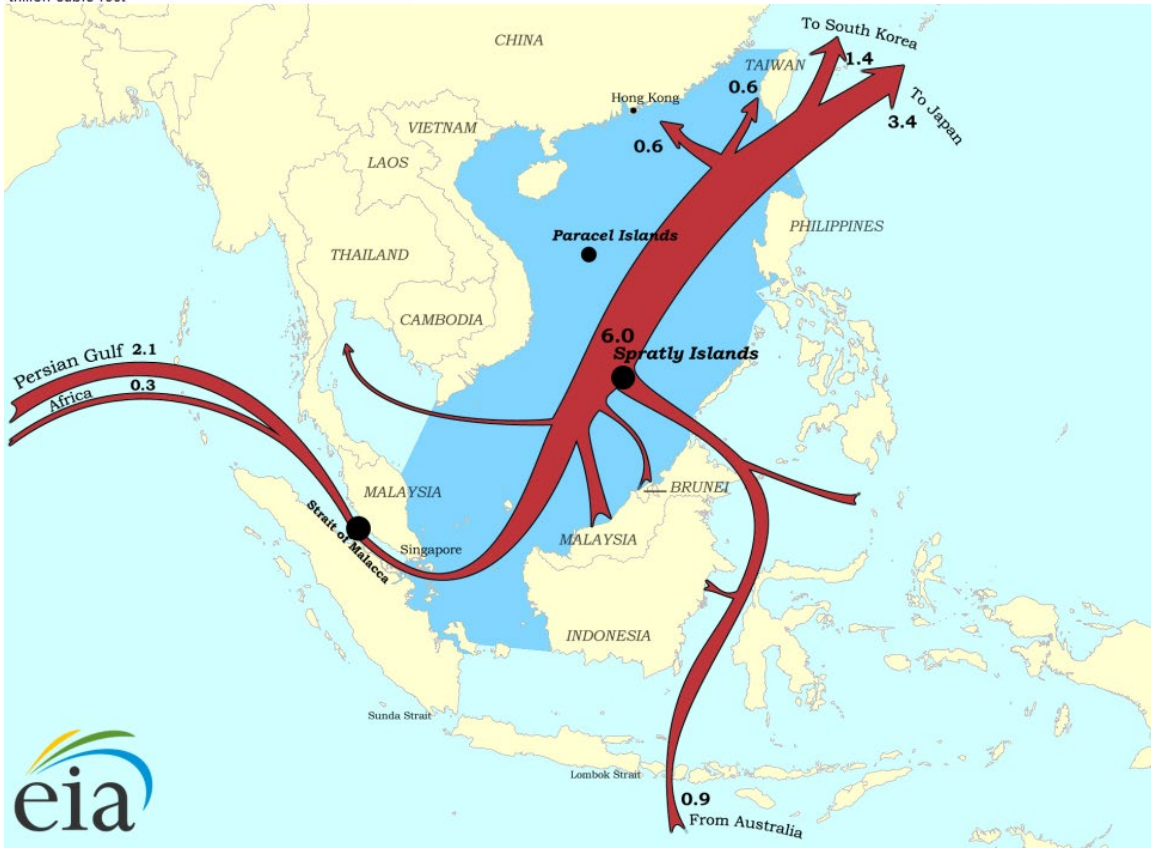


Figure 6. Major Liquefied Natural Gas Trade Flows in the South China Sea (2011)

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “The South China Sea is an Important World Energy Trade Route,” April 4, 2013, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=10671>.

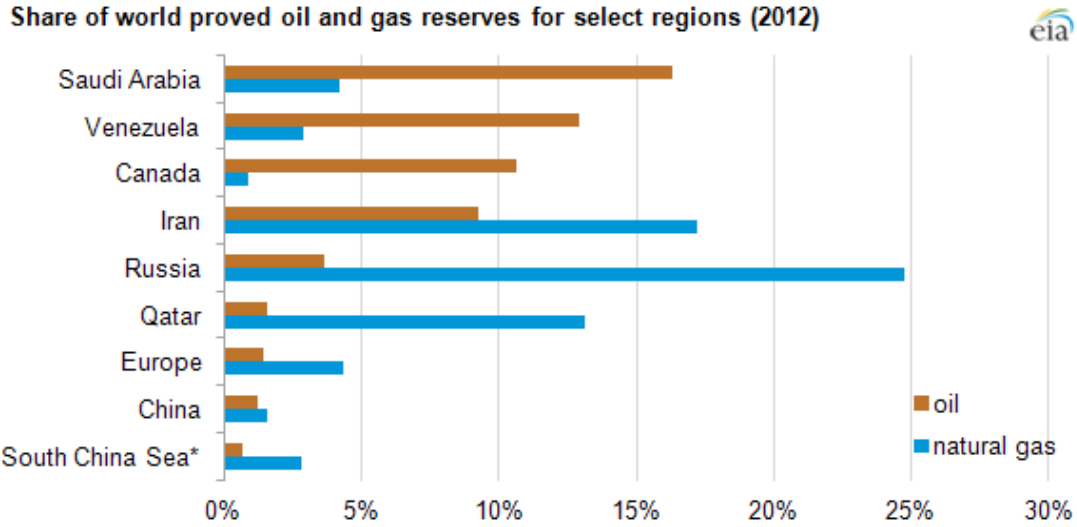


Figure 7. Share of World Proved Oil and Gas Reserves for Select Regions (2012)

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “International Energy Statistics,” *South China Sea Regional Analysis Brief*, and U.S. Geological Survey, *Estimate of Undiscovered Conventional Oil and Gas Resources of the World*, 2012, in U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Contested Areas of South China Sea Likely Have Few Conventional Oil Resources,” April 3, 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=10651>.

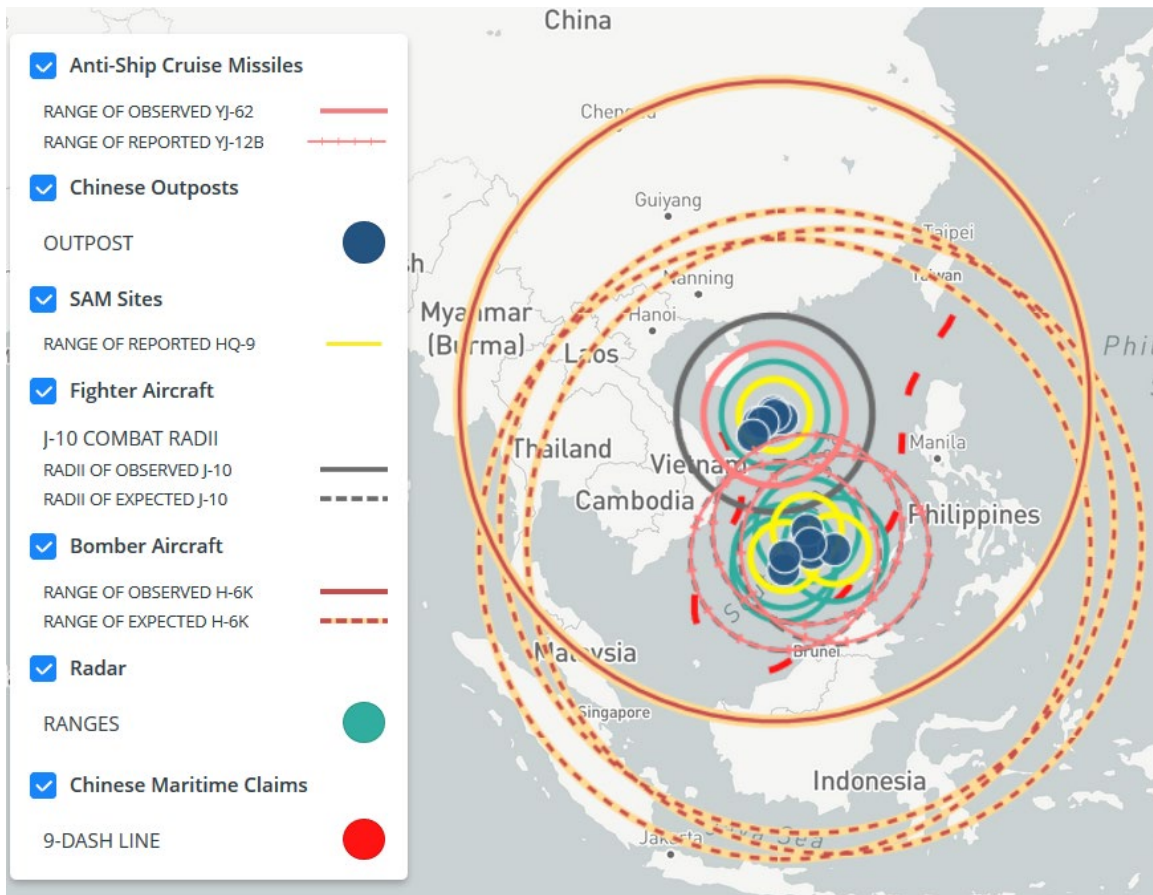


Figure 8. Chinese Detection/Defense Capabilities in the South China Sea

Source: CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Chinese Detection/Defense Capabilities in the South China Sea,” August 16, 2017, accessed November 17, 2017 <https://csis.carto.com/builder/9c94120f-03f9-47e9-995d-316fa5edf77d/embed>.

### Legitimacy of Claims in the South China Sea

In recent years tensions in the South China Sea have escalated. The reason for the tension is the disputes of the parties involved in territory claims in the South China Sea. All the countries that have territories claimed in the South China Sea have their direct interests and also they can provide their legitimate proofs of their claims. Based on international law, a country can acquire territorial sovereignty by one of five ways:

accretion, cession, conquest, prescription, and occupation. First, accretion is described as the expansion of existing territory under the sovereignty of a state through geographical or geological process. Second, cession is the second form of acquisition of territory when one state transfers its territory to another state pursuant by a treaty. Third, conquest is described when one state illegally acquires territory by force. Based on United Nations Charter (Article 2(4)), it is considered illegal, or unlawful. Forth, prescription means occupation of another state's territory over a long period of time. Prescription has three requirements to legally acquire a territory: peaceful, public, and uninterrupted over a long period of time. Fifth, occupation happens when a state acquires sovereignty over territory that is not under control of any other states, or it has been abandoned by the previous owning state. The state discovers a territory without any effective occupation, but does not confer title to this territory. Similar to prescription, occupation must be peaceful, public, and uninterrupted over a long period of time.<sup>47</sup>

The UN Charter, in its purposes and principles, article 2(4), clearly points out the violation of using force as a threat or against another state territory: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, *China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea* (Arlington, VA: CNA Analysis & Solutions, August 2014), accessed May 6, 2018, [https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008433.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008433.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 1945, 3, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>.

In the disputed South China Sea, China and Vietnam are two major claimants in the region. Both countries have evidence to demonstrate their claims to the Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes. However, since the UN Charter took effect in 1945, Vietnam shows they have more convincing evidences to claim the majority of the Spratly and Paracel Archipelagoes. Captain Raul “Pete” Pedrozo, USN, Judge Advocate Corps (ret.), in a Center for Naval Analysis Occasional paper named “China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea,” provides both Chinese and Vietnamese historical evidence for their claims in the South China Sea. Based on the evidences and the UN’s law, he indicates that Vietnam has a superior claim to the South China Sea islands.

Michael McDevitt, Senior Fellow and Project Director in Center for Naval Analysis, summarized Raul (Pete) Pedrozo research *China versus Vietnam: Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea*:

Vietnam titles to the Paracel beginning in the early 18th century, continued by the peaceful, effective, and continuous annexation of the islands and symbolic acts of sovereignty in the early 19th century under Nguyen dynasties until the French colonial period. The French on behalf of Vietnam continued a public, peaceful, and continuous occupied the Paracels until its departure from Indochina in 1956. Following the departure of France from Indochina; Vietnam effectively and continuously administered the islands until China illegally occupied a portion of the islands in 1956 and the entire archipelago in 1974. However, Vietnam never ceases to assert Vietnamese sovereignty over the archipelago.

The French legally exercised its annexation and effective occupation over the Spratly since the 1930s. Vietnam effectively and peacefully controlled the islands after succeeding it, until the illegally occupation of a portion of the archipelago by Republic of China (ROC) and People’s Republic of China (PRC). This was a consequence of World War II when China was the designated country what took over the archipelagoes, which historically belonged to China, from Japan in the South China Sea. However, based on the international law, China has no right to take over the Spratly and the Paracel Archipelagoes.

It is obvious that China illegally used its military forces against the Republic of Vietnam in the Spratly and Paracel Archipelagoes, and against the territorial integrity of Vietnam, between 1954 and 1988. After these invasions, China announced its long-standing claim to both archipelagos and has maintained its occupation in the gained islands. Using military forces to acquire territories is clearly defined as an illegal way to acquire territory. Illegal occupation of the islands in the South China Sea is the reason that China has never collaborated with the international courts in prosecutions relate to the South China Sea disputes.

#### Current Situation in the Disputed Waters in the South China Sea

All features in the South China Sea have at least two nations who claim them. In the South China Sea, the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands are the two archipelagoes that cover the largest area and are located at the strategic positions that can impact international trade flow through the South China Sea and the national security to the countries in the region. They are claimed entirely by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam; while Malaysia, Philippines, and Brunei claim some of the features in the archipelago (See Figure 10). The Spratly Islands contain more than 140 features which include islets, rocks, reefs, shoals and sandbanks spread out in the area of 410,000 kilometers square. Within those 140 features, less than 40 features are islands – which are naturally formed areas of land, surround by water, and above water at high tide as defined in Article 121(1)

of UNCLOS.<sup>49</sup> The Paracel Islands located north of the South China Sea, south of Chinese Hainan Island, east of Vietnam. The distance between the Paracel Islands to Vietnam and to China is approximately the same, which China forcibly took from the Republic of Vietnam in 1974. Even if China refuses the existence of disputes over the islands, the Paracel Islands are still a source of tension between China and Vietnam, especially in fishing grounds. The Paracel Islands consists of about thirty five islets, shoals, sandbanks, and reefs with approximately 15,000 kilometers square of ocean surface. The Woody Island is the largest feature in the Paracel Islands, with the area about 2.1 kilometers square, equal to the total area of all the islands within the Spratly Islands.

Among the nations that have claims in the South China Sea, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam are the countries that have the largest territorial claims. China and Taiwan have almost the same claims in the disputed area based on the 1992 Consensus (or One China Consensus).<sup>50</sup> They both claim the legitimacy of the 9-dash line area that cover 95 percent of the South China Sea, based on the 11-dash map published in 1947 by the

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<sup>49</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982*, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, 2018, 66, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Xu Shiquan, "The 1992 Consensus: A Review and Assessment of Consultations between the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait and the Straits Exchange Foundation," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 23 (2001): 121-140, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.ncafp.org/articles/01%20The%201992%20Consensus-%20A%20Review%20and%20Assessment.pdf>.



Nationalist government of the Republic of China (See Figure 9).<sup>51</sup> In December 2014, in reaction to the South China Sea Arbitration where the Permanent Court of Arbitration rejected the legality of China's nine-dotted line claim, China reasserted sovereignty claims to the South China Sea Islands in the position paper published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China: "China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands (the Dongsha Islands, the Xisha Islands, the Zhongsha Islands and the Nansha Islands) and the adjacent waters."<sup>52</sup> Other country which claims the entire of two archipelagoes including the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands is Vietnam. Vietnam claims the entire two archipelagoes due to historical evidence, economic activities in the area, effective administration, and international recognition.<sup>53</sup> Vietnam also affirm its claims repeatedly in the remarks by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson: "Viet Nam has sufficient legal and historical grounds to affirm its sovereignty over the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) archipelagoes."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Limits in the Sea, No. 143 China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea*, Office of Ocean and Polar Affairs, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, December 5, 2014, 3, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/234936.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Position Paper of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines*, December 7, 2014, accessed April 15, 2018, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1217147.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1217147.shtml).

<sup>53</sup> Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, *China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea*.

<sup>54</sup> Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Remarks by MOFA Spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang on live-fire drills carried out by Chinese Taipei in the waters around Ba Binh in the Truong Sa Archipelago of Viet Nam," August 24, 2018, accessed April 15, 2018, [http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt\\_baochi/pbnfn/ns170824163224](http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns170824163224).

In recent years, due to the territory disputes in the South China Sea, particularly over the rights to explore the area's resources, the potential for conflict is significant. In 2011, Vietnam accused China of severing the cables of an oil and gas survey vessel in two instances.<sup>55</sup> In May 2014, China deployed a deep-sea oil rig in Vietnamese exclusive economic zone, leading to a seventy-three days crisis in diplomacy. The two countries coast guard vessels skirmished around the oil rig, and anti-China chaos erupted in Vietnam, causing damage to the Chinese companies located in Vietnam. And it is possible that China will continue its redeployment of rigs into the disputed waters, which can escalate the tension between two countries.<sup>56</sup> As part of the activities that raise the tensions in the region, countries that have claims in the region have spent years building military outposts in the Spratly Islands, which is in the disputed area of six different countries (See Figure 12). The military outposts in the disputed area can lead to a military race in the region and pose a significant instability to regional security. In 2017, South Korea announced that it would spend an extra 4 percent on defense, hitting a record of 36.5 billion US dollars. Japan spends an unprecedented defense budget of 43.6 billion US dollars. Taiwan is increasing its defense budget in 2018 by 50 percent and Vietnam's defense budget is approximately 4.4 billion US dollars, an increase of 400 percent compared to 2005. China will hit an enormous 203 billion US dollars in 2020, nearly the

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<sup>55</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, "Armed Clash in the South China Sea," Council on Foreign Relations, April 11, 2014, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/report/armed-clash-south-china-sea>.

<sup>56</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, "A China-Vietnam Military Clash," Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2015, accessed April 16 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/report/china-vietnam-military-clash>.

same as the entire Asia-Pacific region spend on arms in 2020. The U.S. State Department, in order to secure U.S. partnerships and its allies in the region, asked for 1.5 billion US dollars for the “Pivot to Asia”.<sup>57</sup> This step, in conjunction with other engaged activities in the region, shows the commitment of the US to counter China’s aggression in the South China Sea.

The commitment of the U.S. to the region also indicates through the Freedom of Navigation Operations despite opposition from China. In UNCLOS, article 87, 89, and 90 clearly define that “No State may validly purport the subject any part of the high seas to its sovereignty”, and “Every State, whether coastal or land-locked, has the right to sail ships flying its flag on the high seas”.<sup>58</sup> The Freedom of Navigation (FON) program was pointed out by the U.S. Department of State:

**Freedom of Navigation (FON) Program.** U.S. policy since 1983 provides that the United States will exercise and assert its navigation and overflight rights and freedoms on a worldwide basis in a manner that is consistent with the balance of interests reflected in the Law of the Sea (LOS) Convention. The United States will not, however, acquiesce in unilateral acts of other states designed to restrict the rights and freedoms of the international community in navigation and overflight and other related high seas uses.<sup>59</sup>

The U.S. has conducted Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) for nearly 40 years around the world. However, in order to challenge the excessive maritime claims

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Pham, “The Arms Race In The South China Sea,” *Forbes*, December 20, 2017, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterpham/2017/12/20/the-arms-race-in-the-south-china-sea/#1df39bbc4b1a>.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Maritime Security and Navigation,” accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/maritimesecurity/>.

of China in the South China Sea, since 2015 the U.S. has conducted seven FONOPs that aim to reestablish the stable, secure region, and counterbalance China in the region.

Article 60(8) of UNCLOS defines: “Artificial islands, installations and structures do not possess the status of islands. They have no territorial sea of their own, and their presence does not affect the delimitation of the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) or the continental shelf.”<sup>60</sup> Hence, even though China has the right to construct the artificial islands, they still have no rights to claim neither territorial sea, the EEZ, nor the continental shelf.

In order to solve the disputes in the region, a Code of Conduct between the participants has been formed in order to administer the behaviors of the relevant countries. The 2002 Declaration on a Code of Conduct (DoC) reaffirmed their commitment to international law, such as the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); the freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea as universally recognized by international law and “self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability”.<sup>61</sup> However, since 2013 and especially in 2014, the Chinese fortifications and militarization of disputed islands in the South China Sea, proved that the DoC was incapable to control the situation because it just acted has the moral constraints on escalating tensions in the

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<sup>60</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> The Government of the Member States of ASEAN and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, *2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*, November 4, 2002, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/2002-Declaration-on-the-Conduct-of-Parties-in-the-South-China-Sea.pdf>.

region of the relevant parties. Because of that, the participants (ASEAN and China) need to have a formal, adequate, and constrained code of conduct to oversee all parties' movements. On 18 May 2017, China and ASEAN agreed to a "framework" for controlling behavior in the South China Sea, which is called the Code of Conduct (CoC). The CoC is a more strengthen and more detailed about supervising involved parties' behavior in the South China Sea. The detail of CoC remains unpublished yet. However, if no significant improvement than the 2002 DoC, there is no doubt that it is difficult to halt the escalating activities which maintain a complicated situation in the region.

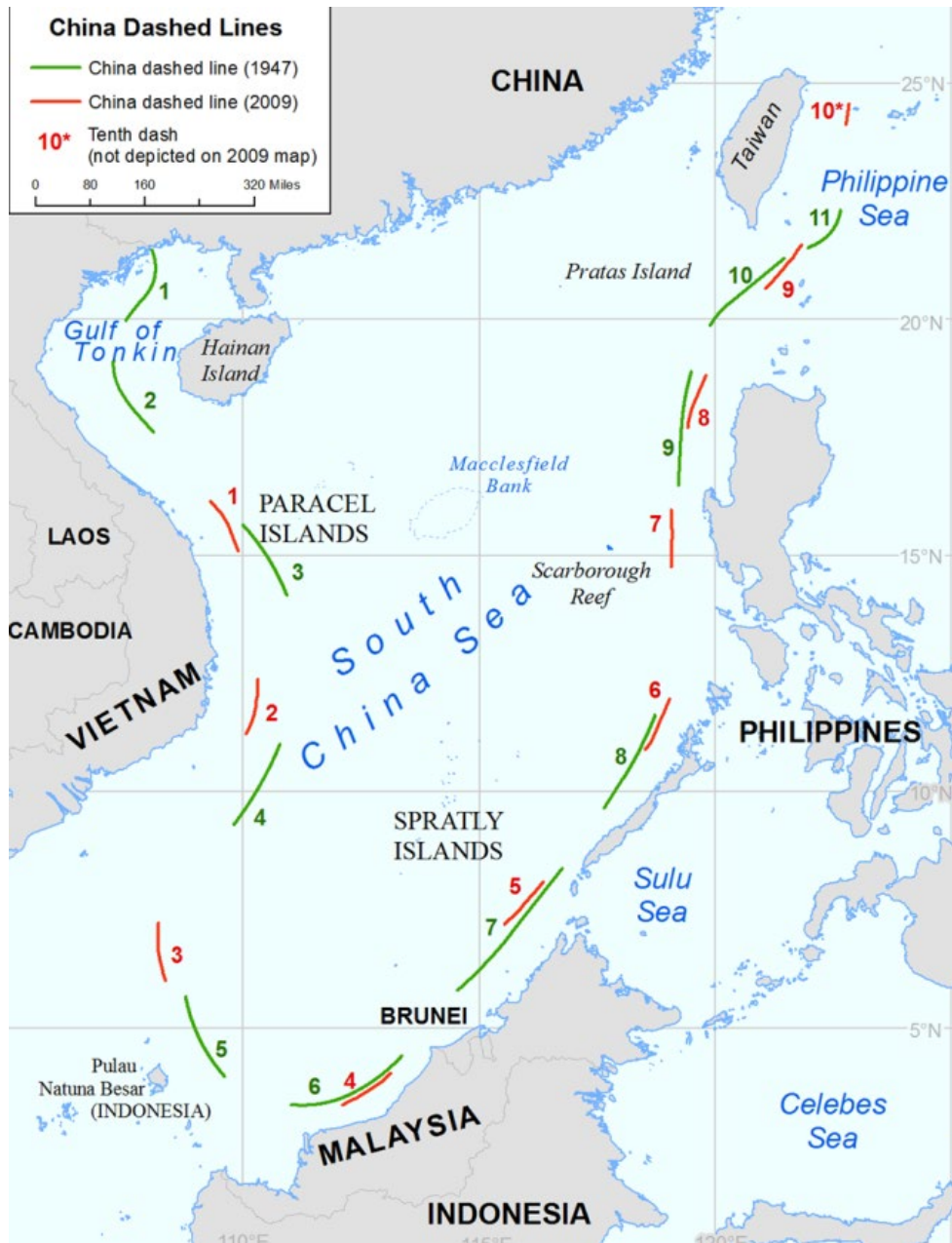


Figure 9. Comparison of Chinese Dashed Line Claim in 2009 and 1947 Maps

Source: U.S. Department of State, *Limits in the Sea, No. 143 China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea*, Office of Ocean and Polar Affairs, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, December 5, 2014, 3, accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/234936.pdf>.



Figure 10. Sovereignty Claims in the South China Sea

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2012*, Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2012, accessed May 18, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2012\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2012_CMPR_Final.pdf).

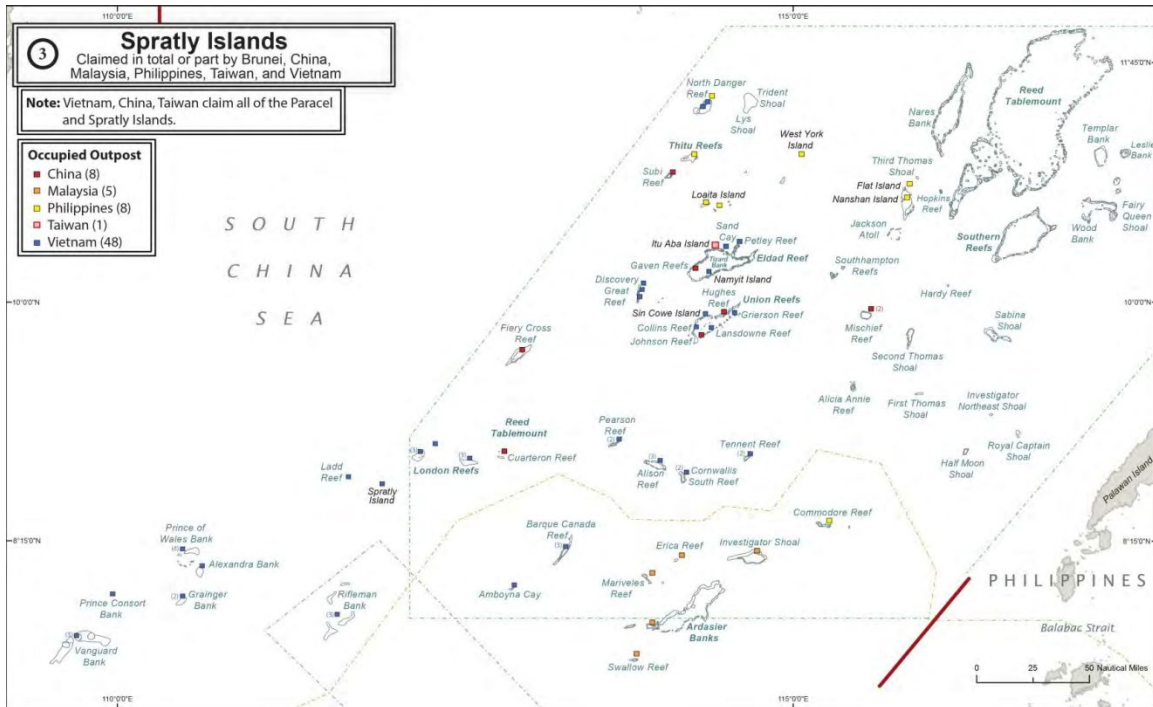


Figure 11. Claims in the Spratly Islands

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives in a Changing Environment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 7, accessed May 18, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF).



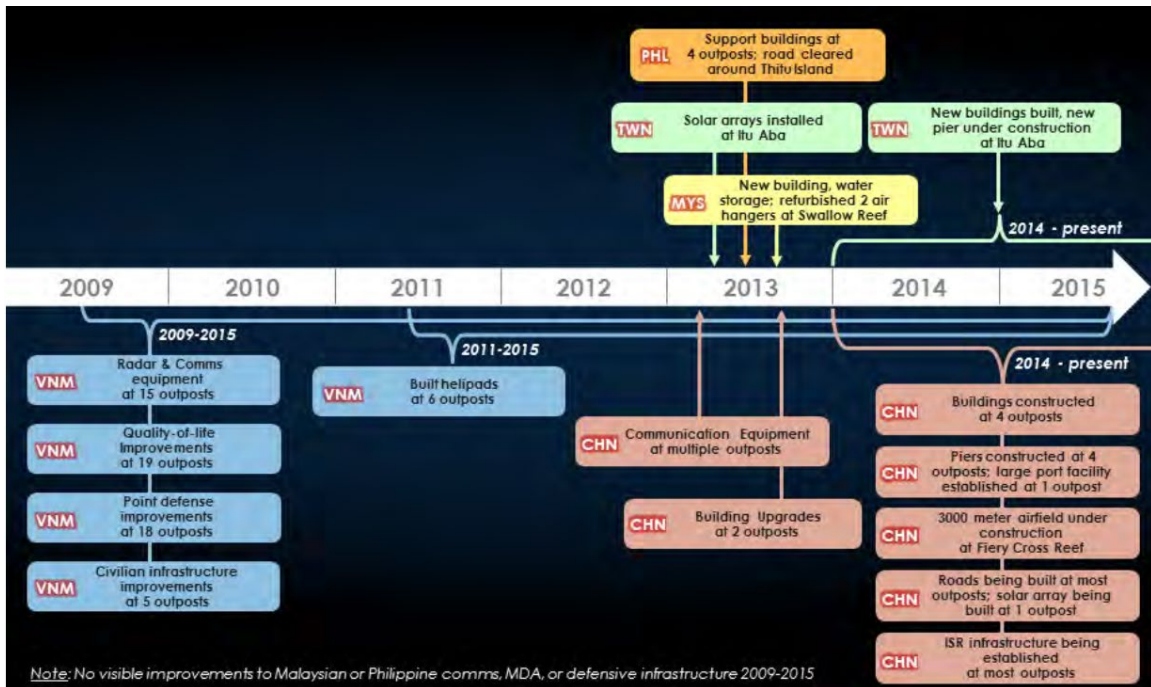


Figure 12. Infrastructure and Capability Improvements on Spratly Outposts

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives in a Changing Environment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 15, accessed May 18, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAAP\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAAP_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF).

## The US and Vietnam Interests in the South China Sea

### The U.S. Interests and Its Policy towards the South China Sea

The South China Sea plays an important military and economic role to the U.S.

The U.S. allies and partners in the region use the South China Sea as the main area of operations and it is the main route for commercial goods traffic. The freedom of navigation, the free access to the sea, and the freedom of over-flight become important to the security of all the close allies of the U.S. in the region. There are four pillars in the National Security Strategy under newly elected President Donald Trump administration.

Those are “Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life,” “Promote American Prosperity,” “Preserve Peace through Strength,” and “Advance American Influence.”<sup>62</sup> Changes in the global balance of power can impact and threaten to the U.S. interests.

Because of that, the U.S administration affirms the priority of the U.S in maintaining the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Overall, the U.S has three main interests in the South China Sea. The National Security Strategy clearly indicates that China aspires to project global power, threatening to the American values worldwide.<sup>63</sup> Maintaining a stable and secure Indo-Pacific and effective influence in the region directly supports the U.S. national interests. There are three reasons which the U.S. must project their presence in the South China Sea region.

First, the U.S. wants to maintain its superpower status on the oceans. Maintaining maritime superiority is the backbone of the global hegemony of the U.S. The dominance of the U.S in the sea facilitates the ability to counter any provocation and proliferation, protect the independence allies and partners, ensure the flow of commerce, and hinder the strength of potential adversaries.<sup>64</sup> To ensure the sea power in the world, the U.S cannot lose control of the South China Sea, one of the most important ocean regions in the world. From an economic perspective, the U.S. wants the Asia-Pacific region to maintain

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<sup>62</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Patrick Cronin, “Maritime Power and U.S. Strategic Influence in Asia,” *War on the Rocks*, April 11, 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/04/maritime-power-and-u-s-strategic-influence-in-asia/>.

its continued economic growth progress, which benefits the U.S. and its allies and partners' economic strength. Eight of the world's ten busiest container ports are in the Asia-Pacific region, and almost 30 percent of the world's maritime trade transits the South China Sea annually, including approximately 1.2 trillion U.S. dollars in shipborne trade bound for the U.S. Approximately two-thirds of the world's oil shipments transit through the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, and in 2014 more than 15 million barrels of oil passed through the Malacca Strait per day.<sup>65</sup> From a military perspective, being able to control the South China Sea and its islands facilitate all the warfighting functions of any operation executed in this region. Recently, China consolidated its control to its claimed territories. Even if there is no legalization for China in controlling the South China Sea territories, China continuously reconstructs and militarizes some entities in the disputed water. China's current expansion in the Spratly islands is focused on building the land-based capabilities of its three largest outposts – Fiery Cross, Subi, and Mischief Reefs – after completion of its four smaller outposts in early 2016 (See figure 12). A majority of the new Chinese outposts include new airfields, large port facilities, and water and fuel storage. Once all these facilities are completed, China will have the capability to maintain three regiments of fighters in the Spratly Islands. The airfields, naval ports, and resupply facilities on the Spratly Islands allow China to maintain a more flexible and persistent military activities in the area.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the expansion of the military facilities in the South China Sea enhances the Chinese intelligence, protection, fires, and mission

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<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*.

command. The airfields in the Spratly islands allow China to have an advantage for execution of reconnaissance and surveillance in the region. Furthermore, the radar systems on these islands can expand the Chinese range of observation, which can hinder the operation of other nations' military activities. The new radar systems also can help China to establish the ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone), which denies the freedom of over-flight. The ADIZ generally expresses and consolidates the illegal claims of the South China Sea sovereignty from China. For fire and protection, the control of the South China Sea allow any nation to generate their own A2AD (Anti-Access Area Denial). This A2AD allows the owning nation to control the entire area of one of the most important oceans in the world for economy and military, and also presents a direct threat to China or any nations in the region.

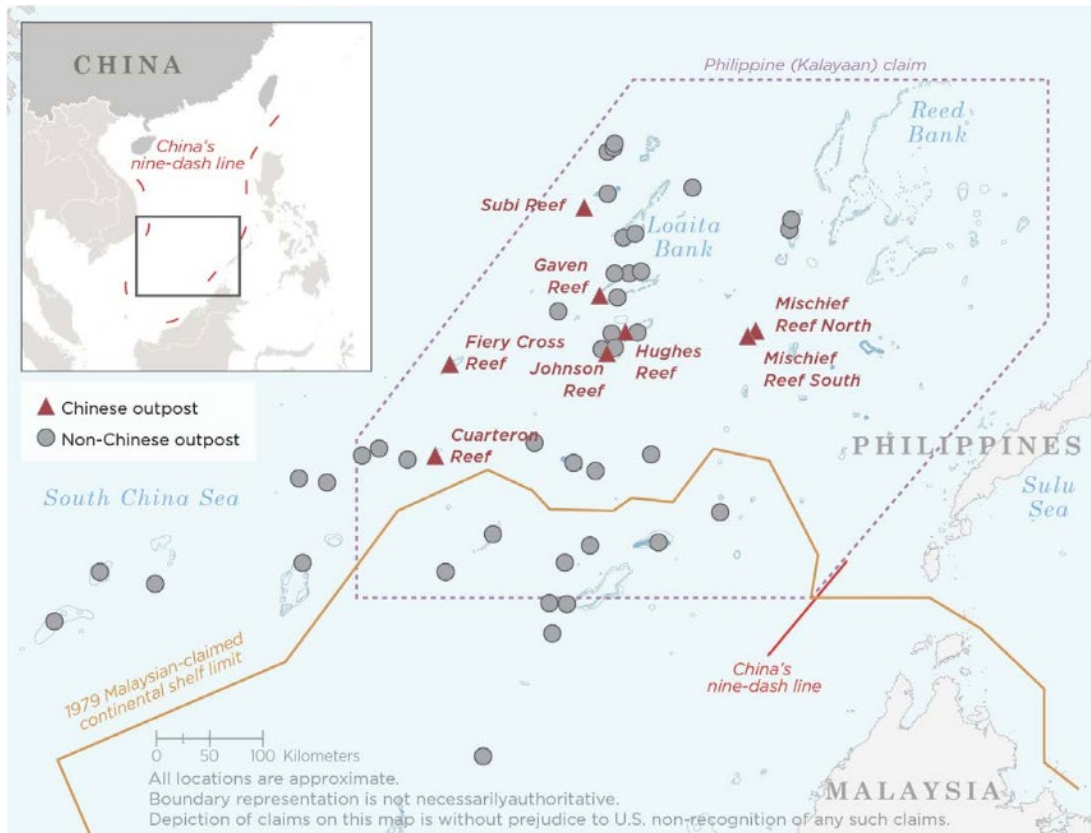


Figure 13. China's Outposts in the Spratly Islands

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, May 15, 2017, accessed May 18, 2018, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF).

Second, through involvement in the South China Sea disputes, the U.S. can hinder the rise of China. In the last decade, China is aspiring to be a superpower. In the near future, China is the only country which can be a threat to the global domination of the U.S. Currently and in the future, there will be a competition and conflict between the U.S. and China because of the area of influence in diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) power in the region and over the world. The rise of China, overall, brings more of a negative effect than positive to the U.S. As a result, hindering the rising

and expanding influence of China is part of the national strategy of the U.S in order to maintain the U.S. domination of the globe. The South China Sea is one of the key areas of influence which the U.S wants to control, because in the recent years, the conflict and disputes between China and the countries in the region keep rising because of the unsolved territories claims. This tension drives neutral nations, which were closer to China, toward the U.S. Consequently, the U.S. has more allies and partners in the region, and they can find common interests with the other nations in the region. Hence, the area of influence of the U.S. will be expanded, weaken the effect of China in all elements of national power (DIME) to the region, hinder the rising of them and weaken the threat to the global domination of the U.S. Through supporting some countries which have disputes in the South China Sea with China, the U.S can encircle China with their allies and partners, mitigate the influence of China to the region, gain the advantage in the geopolitics competition with China to maintain, enhance, and affirm the U.S. role in preserve the stability and security in the region.

Third, the U.S. wants to maintain its international power and its influence globally. The U.S. administration is facing the rising influence of China in the Asia-Pacific region. During the Obama administration, the U.S. started adjusting its global strategy, focusing more on the Asia-Pacific. Under the President Obama administration, the South China Sea is one of the focused regions. In recent years, under the influence of a rising China, some of the U.S. partners have started to soften their relationship with China. The Philippines is an example. China and the Philippines issued a joint statement on November 16, 2017 after the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's official visit to the Philippines. The statement indicated that both sides recognized the bilateral relations

have achieved positive turnaround and agreed to advance Philippines-China relations in a sustained and pragmatic manner.<sup>67</sup> This is a significant step after Philippines brought the South China Sea Arbitration against China concerning the legality of China's "nine-dotted line" claim which includes Philippines' sovereignty. The new Philippines administration under President Duterte, wants a more balanced relationship between Philippines, China, and the U.S. This is due to the increased trade between Manila and Beijing. Nowadays, more and more countries in the region have increased economic dependency to China, which lead to a more influence of China to the region. Losing the ability to influence the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. will also lose the biggest market in the world, and the ability to hinder the Chinese power to be the U.S. strategic competitor.

To facilitate the U.S. interests in the region, the U.S. policies are cornerstones to shape U.S. activities in the region. Among those policies, the U.S. National Security Strategy outlines the national interests and major national security concerns, and how the administration reacts to them. In the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2017 under the President Donald Trump administration, the Indo-Pacific region, the most populated and industrial part of the world, was mentioned first. China, for the first time, was mentioned as a strategic global power competitor with U.S, and is challenging the U.S. leadership in the region.

Although the United States seeks to continue to cooperate with China, China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda. China's infrastructure investments and trade strategies reinforce its

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<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Gao, "Chinese Premier: China-Philippines Relations as Warm as Manila's Weather," *The Diplomat*, November 16, 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/chinese-premier-china-philippines-relations-as-warm-as-manilas-weather/>.

geopolitical aspirations. Its efforts to build and militarize outposts in the South China Sea endanger the free flow of trade, threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability. China has mounted a rapid military modernization campaign designed to limit U.S. access to the region and provide China a freer hand there. China presents its ambitions as mutually beneficial, but Chinese dominance risks diminishing the sovereignty of many states in the Indo-Pacific. States throughout the region are calling for sustained U.S. leadership in a collective response that upholds a regional order respectful of sovereignty and independence.<sup>68</sup>

To counter the threats that hinder the U.S. interests in the region, the NSS clearly identifies the priority actions in the region as political, economic, and military. In political, the U.S. continues to commit, expand, and deepen the alliances and partnerships with the countries that have common interests with the U.S. in the region. The document emphasizes the commitment of the U.S. to protecting freedom of the seas and the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes in accordance with international law, which currently cause tensions in the South China Sea region.<sup>69</sup> In economic realm, the NSS again reaffirms to maintain free and open seaways, transparent infrastructure financing practices, unimpeded commerce, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The U.S. will seek free markets and protect it from forces that would subvert other nations' sovereignty. Also, a network of pro-U.S. states was indicated, and there is no doubt that the U.S. wants to oppose the extension of China in the region.<sup>70</sup> In military and security aspects, the Trump's administration policy toward the South China Sea region is not different from Obama's. It is maintaining forward military presence that can deter and

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<sup>68</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 46.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



defeat any threat to the U.S. security, strengthen and develop the military relationships with allies and partners in the region, and trying to build a strong defense network under the U.S. lead and influence. The Southeast Asian countries were mentioned in the NSS as strategic maritime partners with the U.S. in order to hinder China's rise as a global sea power.

In conjunction with the NSS, the National Defense Strategy (NDS) is the document which provides the ends, ways, and means to the armed forces to detect and defeat any threats to the U.S. and also provide the goals that the country expects the armed forces to accomplish. In the NDS 2018, among the competitors and threats to the U.S., China was mentioned first as the country using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea.<sup>71</sup> In the NDS, as in the NSS, China and Russia are considered the main threat of the U.S., followed by Iran, North Korea, and terrorism. This document has a significant change in priority of the U.S. national security, which remained stable for the last 16 years. In the NDS, the document identified the challenge from China to the U.S.:

China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future. The most far-reaching objective of this defense strategy is to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Now the dominance of the U.S. in military strength is challenged. “Today, every domain is contested-air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.”<sup>73</sup> In the South China Sea, within the defense objectives, which was mentioned in the NDS, includes sustaining military advantages, deterring adversaries from aggression against U.S. interests, maintaining favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, defending allies and partners, and ensuring common domains remain open and free. To achieving these objectives in the region, expanding, strengthening, and evolving Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships into a network that capable of acting against any challenges is the priority of the U.S. The focus of this strategy is on three elements: Foundation of mutual respect, responsibility, priorities, and accountability; regional consultative mechanism and collaborative planning; and interoperability. These elements will strengthen the alliances and partners of the U.S. in the region, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains, in order to have an Indo-Pacific region prosperous and secured.<sup>74</sup>

#### Vietnam’s Interests and Its Policies toward the South China Sea

Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia that has borders in the East, South, and Southwest with the South China Sea. Vietnam has an area of approximately 330,000 kilometers square, with a coastline about 3,260 kilometers, and claims the entire Parcel Islands and the Spratly Islands with more than 3,000 islands and islets scattered

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<sup>73</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,” 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

offshore.<sup>75</sup> The widest area of Vietnam is about 600 kilometers, and the narrowest area is approximately 50 kilometers, so all the major cities of Vietnam are close and easy to approach from the coast line, and about 30 percent of the Vietnamese population live in a coast-line city, and 40 percent of these people's livings depends on sea-related industry. Hence, the South China Sea is critical for the development of the country and also for the national security for Vietnam.

In the tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), The Ocean Strategy to 2020 was declared, which aims to make Vietnam a strong ocean-country.<sup>76</sup> Overall, the ocean economy contributes 47-48 percent to the Vietnam's GDP, which includes mainly from crude oil, fishery, and logistics. Until 2013, the oil reserves of Vietnam were approximately 4.4 billion barrels, standing number one in the Southeast Asia, and the natural gas was about 0.6 trillion m<sup>3</sup>, standing number three behind Indonesia and Malaysia. In the period from 2008-2015, Petrovietnam, which is the Vietnamese national petroleum and gas company, has contributed 16-18 percent of Vietnam's GDP, and overall 20 percent of national budget income.

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<sup>75</sup> Nguyen Minh Duc, "Value Chain Analysis" (thesis, Nong Lam University, Vietnam, April 2011), accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/valuechaininsmallscalefisheries/participatingcountries/vietnam/en/>.

<sup>76</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, *Resolution of the Ocean Strategy to 2020*, 2009, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://cpv.org.vn/he-thong-van-ban/chi-tiet-van-ban/id/2508.html>.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petrovietnam Gross Revenue (trillion Vietnamese dong)	235.0	325.0	363.0	390.0	366.0	311.0
Vietnam's GDP (trillion Vietnamese dong)	1,980.8	2,537.5	2,978.2	3,139.6	3,937.0	4,192.9
Contribution to the GDP (percent)	24.0	26.6	25.9	24.3	9.3	7.4
Contribution to national budget (trillion Vietnamese dong)	110.4	160.8	186.3	195.4	189.4	115.1
Percentage of contribution (percent)	27.9	27.1	24.4	24.1	23.3	13.0
Crude oil to the national budget (percent)	14.4	11.5	18.3	12.1	12.1	7.1

Source: Le Viet Trung, Pham Van Chat, "An Overview of the Vietnam's Oil and Gas Industry," *PetroVietnam Journal* 6 (2016): 57, accessed May 16, 2018, <https://www.vpi.pvn.vn/upload/file/TCDK/2016/Thang%204/Le%20Viet%20Trung.pdf>.

Unit: percent

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Crude oil	9.37	10.36	9.70	7.21	4.79	2.34
Footwear	9.55	9.37	8.58	8.38	6.81	7.39
Garments	20.90	18.91	17.04	17.90	13.84	13.93
Aquaculture	9.36	8.75	7.80	6.68	5.24	4.06
Others	50.82	52.61	57.48	59.83	69.32	72.28
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Le Viet Trung, Pham Van Chat, "An Overview of the Vietnam's Oil and Gas Industry," *PetroVietnam Journal* 6 (2016): 57, accessed May 16, 2018, <https://www.vpi.pvn.vn/upload/file/TCDK/2016/Thang%204/Le%20Viet%20Trung.pdf>.

The crude oil exploited from the South China Sea is one of the main sources to bring the foreign exchange to Vietnam. In 2014, the crude oil export contributed 12.1 percent which was approximately five billion dollars to the national budget, while in 2015, because of the decline in oil prices, the crude oil export decreased to three billion, contributing 7.1 percent. This foreign exchange is important to a trade deficit economy as Vietnam, which helps Vietnam in importing, for international trade, and pay for the national debt. As a country that has oil and natural gas resources, and the contribution from oil and gas exploitation is important to the economy, and so maintaining a stable and secured the South China Sea is critical. It is not only for the petroleum and gas industry, but also a stable and secured region is also important for the fishing industry. For years, the aquaculture had been the cornerstone of the Vietnamese economy, which averaged more than eight percent of the economy before 2012, greatly contributed to the industrialization and modernization of the rural areas of the country. In the General Project of the Aquaculture Development to 2020, vision 2030 issued on 16 August 2013 by the Prime Minister, a number of strategic targets were defined, including the total fishery production will reach to seven million tons in 2020, and nine million tons in 2030 which aquaculture account for 65 percent and the caught aquatic products account for 35 percent. The seafood export values 11 billion US dollars in 2020 with the growth rate about 7-8 percent per year, and 20 billion US dollars in 2030 with a slower growth rate, 6-7 percent per year.

Year	Value (Million US\$)	Growth rate ( percent)
2012	6,076	-0.21
2013	6,681	9.95
2014	7,775	16.37
2015	6,558	-15.65
2016	7,048	7.47
2017	8,316	17.99

*Source:* Created by author based on statistics from General Department of Vietnam Customs, “Overview of the Vietnam Seafood Export in 2017,” 21 March 2018, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.customs.gov.vn/Lists/ThongKeHaiQuan/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=1326&Category=Ph%20percentC3%20percentA2n%20percent20t%20percentC3%20percentADch%20chuy%20percentC3%20percentAAn%20percent20percentC4%20percent91%20percentE1%20percentBB%20percent81&Group=Ph%20percentC3%20percentA2n%20percent20t%20percentC3%20percentADch>.

Besides contributing to the GDP, the fishing industry provides around four million jobs throughout the country,<sup>77</sup> and nearly 10 percent of population in Vietnam derives their main income from fishery. The population of Vietnam is growing by about one percent per year (approximately one million people), so the fishing industry helps Vietnam to maintain a stable society, and the fishermen helps the government to assert the fishing ground in the territory claims in the South China Sea.

Another economic interest of Vietnam in the South China Sea is that this route helps Vietnam to communicate with other countries. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which Vietnam is a member, forms

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<sup>77</sup> T.K.N. Hong T.T.H. Phan T T H, and L. Philippe “Vietnam’s Fisheries and Aquaculture Development’s Policy: Are Exports Performance Targets Sustainable?” *Oceanography & Fisheries Open Access Journal* 5, no. 4 (December 2017): 1.

a trade community that helps members in the agreement have a free and open markets with each other. Within its member, five out of eleven members use the South China Sea as the main route to communicate with other nations including Japan, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Because of this, maintaining a free and open South China Sea helps the Vietnam to develop the maritime economy, in conjunction with the maritime logistics and transportation.

Besides economic issues, security is another critical element of national power that the South China Sea has an important role. The South China Sea can be looked at from different security points of view, for instance, national security, energy security, and diplomatic security. From national security perspective, Vietnam has an entire border with the South China Sea in the east, south, and southwest. All the major cities in Vietnam are at most 150 kilometers from the coast line such as Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang, Can Tho, etc. and they are all connected to the coast by highways. The travel time from the coast line to these cities is less than two hours, which make these busy cities vulnerable if Vietnam cannot control the coast line. Being able to maintain a balanced, open, and free South China Sea helps Vietnam to reduce the risks from the east, which has been a historic invasion route. In case of a military conflict, the South China Sea will be the critical route for aid from Vietnam's allies and partners. In the condition that other countries in the region currently have a closer relationship with China, maintaining an open sea lane will be the only way to help Vietnam avoid being isolated by other countries. Moreover, with the military infrastructure that Vietnam has in the South China Sea, it will be an advantage for Vietnam to operate their navy and their air force in the

South China Sea in order to deter any aggression in the region who wants to establish its hegemony in the region.

The other point is the South China Sea is the connecting route for Vietnam to connect with other countries cross the Pacific. In Vietnam, 80 percent of the merchandise, and 90 percent of the imported and exported goods are transported by sea.<sup>78</sup> The top export destinations of Vietnam are the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Germany while the biggest importers are China, South Korea, Japan, other Asian countries, and Thailand.<sup>79</sup> Open sea lanes support Vietnam in avoiding dependency on their neighbor countries in economic means, and develop the trading transactions with other nations, especially when Vietnam joined the CPTPP, which excluded China, and wants to broaden its trading partners.

Because of the importance of the South China Sea to Vietnam, the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee issued the Resolution on Vietnam Marine Strategy to 2020 with the goal of turning Vietnam into a prosperous country based on maritime economy. The resolution identified the ends, ways, and means for the marine development strategy in Vietnam. The end state of the resolution was described: “Become a strong nation in the sea, become prosperous from the sea, from there enhance the reputation of Vietnam internationally and regionally, contribute to the peaceful and stable environment in the

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<sup>78</sup> Vietnamese Marine Department, “Solutions to Decrease Transportation Expense in Maritime Transportation,” May 12, 2014, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.vinamarine.gov.vn/Index.aspx?page=detail&id=2187>.

<sup>79</sup> Alexander Simoes, “The Observatory of Economic Complexity,” 2016, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/vnm/>.



region.”<sup>80</sup> There were three ends identified in order to achieve the end state of the resolution.

First, Vietnam had to become a strong ocean nation based on bring into play all the potential of the sea, developed thoroughly all the marine branches, businesses, and industries in order to make a rapid, steady, and effective development with a long-term vision. The document clearly states that Vietnam has the full potential to become a strong ocean nation, however, the ineffectiveness of the exploitation makes the contribution of marine industry to Vietnam’s economy and society is not equal to the potential. In the integration context currently, Vietnam needs and must have a strong marine industry in order to contribute to the development of the nation.

Second, the government must develop the national economy and society simultaneously in conjunction to protect the national security in order to promote international collaboration in the ocean preservation from pollution. Until now, there are still disputes in the South China Sea between Vietnam and other nations in the region such as China, Taiwan, or Philippines related to territorial disputes and fishing grounds, hence, economic-societal development must be executed in parallel with protect the national security, based on international law of the sea. The disputes in the region must be resolved peacefully without coercion, threats, or the use of force.

Third, promoting the internal effort in conjunction with attracting investment globally to achieve the win-win cooperation. Vietnam more actively participates in international and regional organizations as a chance for all sides to promote joint

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<sup>80</sup> Vietnam’s Communist Party Central Committee, *Resolution on Vietnam Marine Strategy to 2020*, 1.

collaboration, and the marine economy is one of the focuses in the national investment, in order to support the national interests and protect the national security.

To support these three ends, within the seven orientations of the Ocean Strategy to 2020, there were two orientations focusing on the economy and the military. For the economy, there are four pillars: hydrocarbon exploitation and processing, maritime transportation and logistics, fisheries industry, and tourism. In the 2020, the aims of Vietnam are maritime industry contributing 53-55 percent to the Vietnamese GDP and improving the standard of living quality of the fisheries and people whose living depends on marine industry. For the military, the focus is on the forces which directly protect the national territory and sovereignty such as Coast Guard, Navy, Border Force, and Air Force. The purpose of focusing the investment into those forces is to enhance the defense capability, in order to protect the national maritime territory and sovereignty, be able to deter and defeat any threat not only Vietnam's maritime territory and sovereignty but also the invasions of the mainland from the sea. It is also to develop policies that encourage Vietnamese people to reside on Vietnam's islands and develop the economy on those islands. And finally, to continue trying to find a peaceful resolution to settle the disputes in the South China Sea based on international laws such as UNCLOS and DOC.

The Vietnam Marine Strategy to 2020 is the highest document which shapes the policies for other government departments. The Vietnam's National Defense, which was issued in 2009 by Vietnam's Department of Defense, also followed this resolution for its

policies toward the South China Sea.<sup>81</sup> The documents officially recognized that disputes in the South China Sea have the trend to escalate. The contradictions in national claimed territories, sovereignty, and interests are the main sources that can worsen the situation in the region. The unsolved disputes have the potential to become an armed conflict.

Vietnam's national defense policy is towards self-defense only. Vietnam does not aim to use its armed forces in international relationships in solving disputes with other countries. Vietnam advocates modernizing its military to uphold an adequate military strength in order to be able to defend the country. Vietnam is willing to peacefully negotiate with other nations in order to find a durable resolution for the disputes in the South China Sea based on the UNCLOS of 1982, even though Vietnam has sufficient legal and historical grounds to affirm its sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Vietnam is also willing to enhance the defense relationships with all partners who share the common goal, aims to have a secured, peaceful, independent, and prosperous world.

The Vietnamese national policies demonstrate its strategy toward solving the disputes in the region. Vietnam wants the international involvement of all the nations in the world. It is opposed to the bilateral negotiations in solving disputes in the South China Sea of China. Moreover, Vietnam shows its willing to modernize its military to protect its claims in the South China Sea against opponents. Understanding the similarity of the U.S. and Vietnam interests in the South China Sea, it is obvious that the two

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<sup>81</sup> Vietnam's Department of Defense, *Vietnam's National Defense*, December 2009, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/files/library/ARF%20Defense%20White%20Papers/Vietnam-2009.pdf>.

countries will develop their relationships in the future. The collaboration between the two nations helps Vietnam to have a strong ally to balance the aggression of China in the disputed area, while the U.S. has a partner who has a strong military capability and a will to maintain a secured, peaceful, stable, and open South China Sea. Matching the two countries national policies, the military cooperation between the two nations is one of the focuses of their bilateral relationships.

CHAPTER 5  
THE FUTURE OF MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN  
THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM

By analyzing the two countries' national interests in the South China Sea, it is obvious that a stronger relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam will enhance the mutual trust and support for the common strategic interests in the region of the two nations. Vietnam's objectives are developing its country, enhance the collaboration internationally, and protect their territory and sovereignty, while the U.S. goal is to shift its attention back to the Indo-Pacific, maintain its influence and protect its interests in the region. Military cooperation between two countries has been upgraded significantly in recent years, marking the milestones in the mutual relationship between the two nations.

Current Defense Relations between the United States and Vietnam

The military cooperation is one of the solutions for both nations to protect their national interests in the South China Sea. The relationship between the two countries and the rising of China are two components that heavily contribute to the stronger military relationships between the U.S. and Vietnam. The two nations have achieved a huge step forward in bilateral relationship since the normalization of relations in 1995. In 2011, Vietnam and the U.S. signed the first formal defense accord since the normalization in 1995 with the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Advancing Bilateral Defense Cooperation which focused on five priority areas: regular high-level policy dialogues; maritime security; search and rescue; humanitarian assistance and disaster

relief; and peacekeeping.<sup>82</sup> Another framework for the military engagements between two countries is the *U.S.-Vietnam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam*.<sup>83</sup> The statement is a step forward by both sides to develop the military relationship between two countries, followed the 2013 U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership. The guiding themes of the statements clearly identified that the defense relationship seeks to advance five areas of interests: security and stability within each country and the region; international law and principles; non-traditional security threats; free flow of commerce; and overcome the past. This era is obviously the warmest time in the bilateral military relationship between the two countries. In 2014, the military sales embargo had partly lifted to permit US transfer of lethal maritime-security equipment to Vietnam. Vietnam's first US equipment purchase was declared in early 2015 at a cost of 18 million US dollars, with six Metal Shark-produced Defiant 75 fast patrol vessels for the Vietnam Coast Guard. On May 23, 2016, President Barack Obama announced that the U.S. government has fully lifted its military embargo on Vietnam, which marked a stepping stone of the military collaboration between two countries. In May 2017, the U.S. delivered a decommissioned U.S. Coast Guard Hamilton-class high-endurance cutter *Morgenthau* ship to the Vietnamese Coast

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<sup>82</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, "U.S.-Vietnam Defense Relations: Convergence Not Congruence," China Policy Institute, March 12, 2014, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://cpianalysis.org/2014/03/12/u-s-vietnam-defence-relations-convergence-not-congruence/>.

<sup>83</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-Viet Nam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam."

Guard.<sup>84</sup> Besides the military equipment trade, the strategic-level discussions by senior leadership from each side's defense ministry have occurred regularly. Since President Donald J. Trump's inauguration in 2017, the U.S. and Vietnam has exchanged visits between defense leadership to each country. In August 2017, General Ngo Xuan Lich officially visited the U.S. to discuss the growing U.S.-Vietnamese defense relationship and regional security challenges. General Lich is the third Vietnamese Minister of National Defense to have visited the U.S. The two sides agreed on deepening the defense cooperation, expanding maritime cooperation, and the support from the U.S. to improve Vietnam's maritime law enforcement capabilities.<sup>85</sup> In return, Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis made an official visit to Vietnam in January 2018. This is the sixth visit to Vietnam by an U.S. Secretary of Defense. The two leaders reaffirmed the consistent growing defense relationship of two countries, focusing on maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and peacekeeping operations.<sup>86</sup> Also at this meeting, they agreed toward a visit by a U.S. aircraft carrier to Da Nang in March 2018,

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<sup>84</sup> *IHS Markit*, "Inroads into Indochina: Vietnam as an Emerging Market," 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://www.janes.com/images/assets/462/72462/Inroads\\_into\\_Indochina\\_Vietnam\\_as\\_an\\_emerging\\_market.pdf](http://www.janes.com/images/assets/462/72462/Inroads_into_Indochina_Vietnam_as_an_emerging_market.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Readout of Secretary Mattis' Meeting with Vietnamese Minister of National Defense Lich," August 9, 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1272572/readout-of-secretary-mattis-meeting-with-vietnamese-minister-of-national-defense/>.

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Readout of Secretary Mattis' Meeting with Vietnamese Minister of National Defense," January 25, 2018, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1423285/readout-of-secretary-mattis-meeting-with-vietnam-minister-of-national-defense/>.

which was the first since 1975. On March 5, 2018, the USS *Carl Vinson* made historic port visit to Da Nang, which marked a significant milestone in two countries bilateral relationships, which also demonstrated the U.S. commitment to the region, and Vietnam willingness to welcome a new-formed military partner.

Another program that enhanced the closeness between two militaries is the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. In 2005, the United States started to include Vietnam in its IMET program, but it was restricted in language training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.<sup>87</sup> In 2009, the financial support to Vietnam for this program was 196,000 US dollars, but it has grown quickly to 1,500,000 US dollars in 2015.<sup>88</sup> Currently, Vietnamese officers attend all U.S. Armed Forces branches such as Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard, etc. from the tactical level to strategic level. In 2009, the U.S. formally accepted Vietnam's membership in the Foreign Military Financing Program, in which the budget for Vietnam to improve their military capability has risen from half million US dollars in 2009 to 10 million US dollars in 2015.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, since 2007, the two armed forces have conducted military to military interaction in form of a joint military operation named Pacific Angel. The

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<sup>87</sup> Xin Qiang, "US-Vietnam Security Cooperation: Development and Prospects," China Institute of International Studies, May 11, 2015, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content\\_7894319.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content_7894319.htm).

<sup>88</sup> U.S. Department of State, "International Military Education and Training Account Summary," January 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Military Financing Account Summary," January 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm>.



operation includes U.S. service members, the Vietnam People’s Army (VPA), several nongovernmental organizations, and partner nations to conduct humanitarian assistance. This operation has positively impacted tens of thousands of people and helps build the interoperability of the two militaries.<sup>90</sup> Currently, the two armies are cooperating with each other to solve the legacy of the Vietnamese War. Since 2007, the U.S. Congress has appropriated nearly 110 million US dollars to Vietnam for dioxin removal and related health services in Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>91</sup> Between 1993 and 2012, the United States provided approximately 35.5 million US dollars for demining efforts and around 26.8 million US dollars for programs for war victims. Nowadays, the U.S. has spent around 4.5 million US dollars annually on demining and supporting war victims programs.<sup>92</sup> Even though there have been significant improvements in two countries and two armed forces collaborations, there are still some obstacles which impact the military relationships between the two nations.

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<sup>90</sup> Tech. Sgt. Kamaile Casillas, “Pacific Angel: U.S., Vietnam Continue to Build Partnership,” U.S. Pacific Command, September 14, 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1311655/pacific-angel-us-vietnam-continue-to-build-partnership/>.

<sup>91</sup> Mark E. Manyin, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, June 24, 2014), 23, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40208.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Obstacles for Strengthening the Military Relationships  
between the Two Nations

China Factor

Among all the components which can impact to the military relationship between Vietnam and the U.S., China has a significant influence on both countries. Both Vietnam and the U.S do not want to confront China. For Vietnam, China is one of three countries that have border with Vietnam, and has huge military and economic power. China is the largest trading partner of Vietnam, with the two-way trade reached to 93.69 billion US dollars in 2017, account for 22 percent of Vietnam's total import-export value.<sup>93</sup> China plays an important role in maintaining a stable and secured Vietnam's economy, especially in agriculture, electronic devices and components, oil and natural gas, ore and natural resources, which are important components of the Vietnamese economy. China is one of the three countries that has long border with Vietnam, has a long and sophisticated history of interaction, and has overlapping interests in the South China Sea and also in neighbors countries such as Laos and Cambodia. Living beside a global giant such as China, it is always better for Vietnam to find a solution for collaboration instead of confrontation if no national interests are harmed. However, the current circumstances have gone in a direction that does not go along with Vietnam's desire, hence Vietnam has to find a partner who shares their common interests in the region. Moreover, the changing national policies of some countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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<sup>93</sup> Vietnam Ministry of Industry and Trade, *Annual Report on Vietnam's Export and Import 2017*, 2018, 8, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://www.trungtamwto.vn/sites/default/files/publications/bao\\_cao\\_xnk\\_vn\\_2017.pdf](http://www.trungtamwto.vn/sites/default/files/publications/bao_cao_xnk_vn_2017.pdf).

(ASEAN) such as Philippines or Cambodia towards a closer relationship with China isolates Vietnam if China uses its influence to establish regional hegemony in the region.

For the U.S., China is also the largest trading partner with around 578.2 billion US dollars during 2016. The U.S. exports of goods and services to China provide estimated 911,000 jobs for U.S. in 2015. China was the U.S largest supplier of imports in 2016 with the total amount was 462.6 billion US dollars, and the third largest goods export market in 2016 with the total amount was 115.6 billion US dollars in 2016.<sup>94</sup> The importance to each other makes these two countries not want to escalate the tensions between them in order to maintain a condition that supports to their mutual benefits. Also, China and the U.S. have mutual interests in some regional issues such as the North Korea's nuclear program. Currently, the U.S. maintains large armed forces in South Korea and Japan to protect its allies from threat. Japan and South Korea are large trade partners with the U.S. and also play important role in maintaining the U.S. presence in the region. Ensuring the security for those U.S. allies and the stability in the region is also the U.S. focus which was often mentioned in the U.S. National Security Strategy of President Trump's era. On the other side, China has been the major assistant source to North Korea in diplomacy, economy, and military. Because of that, China has important influence in North Korea in this country's diplomacy. To achieve the U.S. desire in North Korea, the U.S.-China relationship is important to satisfy all the participants' interests.

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<sup>94</sup> Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "U.S-China Trade Facts," 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china>.

The U.S-China-Vietnam relations still maintain a number of issues that cannot be solved in a near future. Each of the changes in national policies of one country can have both positive and negative impacts on the other nation. Because of that, China's view will always need to be carefully accessed when the U.S. and Vietnam wants to deepen their relationship in order to bring common interests to both countries and hinder the negative consequences in the relationship with China.

### Human Rights

Human rights are one of the most sophisticated obstacles in the U.S.-Vietnam relations. Since the end of Vietnam War, the relationships between the U.S. and Vietnam have developed significantly. However, the two countries recognized the differences in human rights, which were indicated in the *United States – Vietnam Joint Vision Statement*, as one of the conditions to further the relationship between two countries.<sup>95</sup>

Human rights were important in the U.S. government announcements:

The United States supports a strong, independent, and prosperous Vietnam that respects human rights and the rule of law. The Vietnamese government's commitment to protect fundamental human rights is a crucial aspect of our bilateral relationship and continued progress in that area will enable the Vietnamese people and the U.S.-Vietnam partnership to reach its fullest potential.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "United States – Vietnam Joint Vision Statement," July 07, 2015, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/07/united-states-%E2%80%93-vietnam-joint-vision-statement>.

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Vietnam," Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, December 11, 2017, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>.

Also, in the *Vietnam 2016 Human Right Report* of the United States Department of State, there were criticisms in various fields related to Vietnam's human rights. They included suppression of dissent, unfair and barred elections, integrity of the person, civil liberties, freedom to participate in the political process, corruption and lack of transparency in government, governmental attitude regarding international and nongovernmental investigation of alleged violations of human rights, discrimination, societal abuses, and worker rights.<sup>97</sup> These criticisms are still a source of contention with members of the U.S. Congress, which can contribute to the delay in the development progress of the U.S.-Vietnamese relationship. However, the U.S. recognized Vietnam's ongoing efforts trying to reduce differences and improve mutual understanding on human rights with the U.S.

The United States welcomes Vietnam's ongoing efforts to harmonize its laws with its 2013 Constitution and international commitments, which Vietnam undertakes for its comprehensive development, including the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United States welcomes Vietnam's ratification of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the two countries look forward to technical cooperation in this regard.<sup>98</sup>

Vietnam asserts that its consistent policy is to ensure and support the human rights in according with the international human rights conventions which Vietnam is a member. Vietnam argued that the Vietnam human right reports of the U.S. was subjective

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<sup>97</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Vietnam 2016 Human Rights Report*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2016, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265598.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "United States – Vietnam Joint Vision Statement."

and did not reflect accurately the human right conditions in Vietnam. On the *National Report on the Human Right Execution in Vietnam*, Vietnam affirmed its commitment to the policies and mechanisms related to the promotion of human rights protection, implement the Millennium Development Goals, including hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, job creation, advance social security, education, and health service, better protection of fundamental human rights, paying particular attention to disadvantaged groups of people, and actively promoting international cooperation in relation to human rights.<sup>99</sup> Vietnam countered the U.S. accusation on Vietnam by providing demonstrations of respect, protection, and enhancement of the human rights such as freedom of speech, press, and information, freedom of religion and beliefs, the rights of prisoners and the rights to have a just judge.<sup>100</sup>

Understandably, there are still some misunderstanding and differences between the two nations related to human rights. These disputes can impede the relationship process between the two nations and two militaries. In these circumstances the two nations are operating in a region which need a closer rapport to support the common interests, human rights should not a component to hinder that relationship.

In order to mitigate those differences, there are needed efforts from both sides to eliminate the misunderstanding between the U.S. and Vietnam considering human rights. Two countries need to maintain regularly positive, frank, and constructive dialogue on

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<sup>99</sup> Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *National Report on Human Right Execution in Vietnam*, February 2014, accessed May 6, 2018, <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/vi/nr040807104143/nr040807105001/ns090423105036>.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

human rights to further mutual understanding and reduce the differences. The dialogue channel between the two nations can effectively solve the problems in respect to international laws and conventions. Furthermore, the U.S. and Vietnam can continue to exchange officials in all levels in order to find the common interests between the two nations. The gradual interaction between the two countries will find a solution for the present differences.

#### Potential Military Cooperation between the United States and Vietnam

The military cooperation between the U.S. and Vietnam has started since 2005 with the establishing the first International Military Education and Training (IMET). Since then, a defense relationship between two countries gradually developed. In 2016, a significant change in the bilateral defense relationship occurred with the full lifting of the U.S. lethal weapons sales embargo on Vietnam. Even though there are still obstacles for the military relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam, the potential defense cooperation between the two countries is vast, and when this cooperation meets the expectations from both sides, it can cope with any challenge in the region to both the U.S. and Vietnam. Within the vast potential military cooperation between the U.S. and Vietnam, there are some fields that show significant potential in the near future.

#### Exchange Military Education and Training

Since 2005, the IMET program has taken place in order to deepen mutual trust, understanding, and interoperability between the U.S. and Vietnam's armed forces. In 2015 and 2016, there were 200 students trained by the U.S. in three fields: Military Professionalization, Maritime and Transnational Threats, and Peacekeeping. From only

English training and without Vietnamese officers in professional fields, now there are wide ranges of education from tactical to strategic level.<sup>101</sup> In the circumstances that Vietnam has developed its military relationship with the U.S., having adequate officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who can fully understand the U.S. military systems, procedures, decision making process, etc. is necessary. It helps the two armed forces to build mutual understanding not only about the military side but also the cultural side, and people to people. The IMET program has shown remarkable effectiveness in building the Vietnamese People's Army capabilities in regional and international missions, exercises, or operations. Hence, the IMET program should be expanded in more fields, especially in naval education and training, in order to meet the challenges in the region, and also to prepare for future cooperation between the two navies, after the historic port call of the U.S. aircraft carrier *Carl Vinson* at Danang, Vietnam in March 2018.

On the other side, the U.S. should send their military personnel to Vietnam's training facilities in order to build mutual trust and also show the willingness to enhance the bilateral defense relationship. Currently, the exchange military personnel from U.S. to Vietnam is limited to navy exchange during port visits, engineer support in the war legacy's demining operations, and humanitarian operations. With the extension of military relationship, the areas of collaboration will be expanded. The focus of the two governments and the two armed forces is on maritime currently, so the naval exchange

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<sup>101</sup> U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Military Training Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016-Joint Report to Congress*, 2016, 43, 44, 45, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265162.pdf>.



should be taken more regularly, to include larger exercises, and broader number of activities.

Another important activity that the two armed forces should execute is the bilateral dialogue in all levels. Currently, beside the recently visits of the Vietnam's Minister of National Defense and the U.S. Secretary of Defense, an annual bilateral dialogue was organized in January 2018 to discuss Vietnamese-U.S. political, security, and defense issues.<sup>102</sup> Two sides agreed to continue to implement agreements reached by the two countries' senior leaders, aiming to boost the ties in a practical and effective manner, maintaining regular meetings and dialogues. In the context of growing the military relationship, two sides should continue to deepen bilateral ties through the exchange of military delegations, especially high ranking ones, humanitarian assistance, maritime security, and defense trade. The continuing open dialogue helps build respect and mutual understanding, reinforcing the friendship and cooperation between the two armies.

#### Arms Sale

In 2016, U.S. fully lifted its lethal weapons sales embargo on Vietnam which opened a new era of military trade between the two nations. Since 2014, the U.S. has provided more than 45.7 million US dollars to Vietnam to build its maritime security capabilities. Moreover, the Department of Defense has committed 425 million US dollars

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<sup>102</sup> The Socialist Republic of Vietnam Online Newspaper of the Government, "9th VN-U.S. Political, Security, Defense Dialogue Organized," January 2018, accessed May 6, 2018, <http://news.chinhphu.vn/Home/9th-VNUS-Political-Security-Defense-Dialogue-organized/20181/33046.vgp>.

funding for a regional initiative over five years. The U.S. is also providing 18 MetalShark 45-foot patrol boats, as well as training and maritime law enforcement equipment to Vietnam's Coast Guard (VCG).<sup>103</sup> And in March 2018, the first six MetalShark patrol boats were delivered to VCG, during the visit of Vice Admiral Fred M. Midgette, Commander of U.S. Coast Guard Defense Force West, Pacific Area.<sup>104</sup> In May 2017, the U.S. transferred a high endurance cutter to Vietnam Coast Guard, in order to improve the VCG maritime domain awareness and improve its capability to perform maritime law enforcement.<sup>105</sup> These are the beginning steps for the U.S.-Vietnam arms sales relationship. In the context that Vietnam needs to build up its defense capabilities to meet with current challenges, the military trading between two countries is a promising development.

Vietnam in recent years has seen the highest increases in military expenditures in the region. Vietnam's military spending has increased nearly 400% percent in the last ten years, reached to approximately 5.0 billion US dollars in 2016, and is expected to climb to 6.2 billion US dollars in 2020. Vietnam remains as the number twelve top arms

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<sup>103</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Fact Sheet: United States-Vietnam Relations," May 2016, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/23/fact-sheet-united-states-vietnam-relations>.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, "The United States Transfers Six Metal Shark Patrol Boats to Vietnam," March 2018, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/pr03292018/>.

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Coast Guard District 14 Hawaii Pacific, "U.S. Transfers High Endurance Cutter to Vietnam Coast Guard," May 2017, accessed May 6, 2018, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1197061/us-transfers-high-endurance-cutter-to-vietnam-coast-guard/>.

importers in the world between 2010 and 2016.<sup>106</sup> Until now, the majority of weapons imported by Vietnam came from Russia, with several major contracts such as six Kilo-class attack submarines, the S-300 air defense system, T-90 tanks, Su-30Mk2 fighter aircrafts, frigates and corvettes, etc. However, Vietnam does not want to risk its defense capability by depending too much on any sole country provider. In recent years, Vietnam is trying to diversify its sources in imported weapons such as Israel, Japan, India, etc. With the full lifting of the lethal weapons embargo on Vietnam and shared common interests in the region, the U.S. is one of the trustworthy military trading partners with Vietnam. With the military budget at approximately 5 billion US dollars, Vietnam will be a potential customer for the U.S. military industry. In the remarks by President Trump before bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Phuc of Vietnam in November 2017, President Trump indicated that “We would like you to buy your equipment from the United States,” “and we have to get rid of the trade imbalance”.<sup>107</sup> In 2017, the trade deficit of the U.S. to Vietnam was approximately 32 billion U.S. dollars, and as he mentioned, “Important to me is trade,”<sup>108</sup> there is possible linkage between the lethal weapons sale to Vietnam and the trade deficit in order to satisfy both sides.

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<sup>106</sup> The International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Vietnam Country Commercial Guide - Vietnam – Defense Sector*, 2017, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Vietnam-Defense-Sector>.

<sup>107</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Remarks by President Trump before Bilateral Meeting with Prime Minister Phuc of Vietnam,” November 2017, accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-bilateral-meeting-prime-minister-phuc-vietnam-hanoi-vietnam/>.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

In fact, the arms sales from U.S. to Vietnam will benefit both sides. For the U.S., the arms deal with Vietnam can create more jobs and exports revenue. Furthermore, with the strategy to rebalance the Indo-Asia-Pacific, the U.S wants to have better allies and partners in the region, and Vietnam is one of them. Strengthening Vietnam's military capabilities will contribute to the achievement of the U.S. goal to maintain a balance of power in the region in order to deter a rising China. On the other hand, Vietnam will have another partner whose power can encounter China to protect their interests, also, Vietnam will reduce its dependence on Russian arms imports, in case of any interference or disruption of military trade between Vietnam and Russia.

Even though there are obstacles for weapons trading between the U.S. and Vietnam, there is the potential for expanding arms sales between the U.S. and Vietnam. To implement this, the two senior leaders shared a vision in bilateral relationship, with the maritime security is the trend for the military cooperation between them. With the focus on the maritime of Vietnam, the VCG will be the priority to modernize. Currently, VCG is lacking of capabilities in conducting law enforcement from other states' aggression in the region. In 2014, when the Chinese drilling rig 981 entered the disputed water between China and Vietnam, the VCG and Vietnam People's Navy (VPN) were incapable to confront the Chinese fleet which protected the oil rig. From this experience, the missing gaps of the VCG and VPN should be fulfilled in order to cope with upcoming challenges. VCG and VPN currently are looking to strengthening their surface fleets, as well as anti-ship and air defense missiles, combat aircraft, and naval patrol craft.<sup>109</sup> In

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<sup>109</sup> The International Trade Administration-U.S. Department of Commerce, *Vietnam Country Commercial Guide - Vietnam-Defense Sector* (2017).

order to protect Vietnam's occupied outpost in the South China Sea, their priority is the military aircraft. It is believed that Vietnam is considering purchasing F-16 fighter aircraft, F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, and P3-C Orion maritime patrol aircraft armed with torpedoes.<sup>110</sup> Even though there is still some discussion about this purchase, however, there is no doubt that opening the military market to the U.S. will improve the VPN and VCG capabilities, and also diversify the military weapons sources for Vietnam, avoiding the dependence on a sole country.

### Joint Operations and Exercises

As mentioned in *The United States – Vietnam Joint Statement 2017*, the priorities for bilateral defense cooperation are humanitarian cooperation, war legacies, and maritime security.<sup>111</sup> Correspondingly, there are potential joint projects, operations, and exercises to implement those priorities. For the war legacies, the two countries are continually sustaining an effective cooperation in order to solve the legacies of the Vietnamese War. Starting in 2012 and by 2017, the Agent Orange cleanup project at Vietnam's Da Nang International Airport was nearly completed. This project marks a stepping stone in two countries' relationship, since the Agent Orange was one of the obstacles which hindered a closer relationship between the two former adversaries.

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<sup>110</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "Will Vietnam Buy F-16 Fighter Jets and US Sub Hunting Planes," *The Diplomat*, May 27, 2016, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/will-vietnam-buy-f-16-fighter-jets-and-us-sub-hunting-planes/>.

<sup>111</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Joint Statement for Enhancing the Comprehensive Partnership between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam."

Following the success of this project, the two countries need to continue their cooperation in solving the war legacies, such as at Bien Hoa Airport, which is contaminated by 408,500 – 495,300 cubic meters, three times higher than Da Nang International Airport.<sup>112</sup> Besides the Agent Orange cleanup project, another program that works effectively to lift the war legacies obstacles in the relationship between the two countries is the humanitarian demining collaboration. Since 1993, the U.S. is the largest donor to Vietnam in addressing the threats of unexploded ordnance, and has contributed over 92 million US dollars in over 25 years.<sup>113</sup> In order to further the collaboration of two countries in solving the war legacies, especially in demining unexploded ordnance, two countries need to open more projects in cities that have highest number of unexploded ordnance in Vietnam, such as Quang Tri, Binh Duong, Quang Ngai, etc. Second, two countries should establish a data center for unexploded ordnance and its victims in order to have a plan for future projects. Third, the U.S. and Vietnam should put bilateral effort on building prosthetic arms and legs factories to help the ordnance victims to have better conditions to integrate into normal life.

For the maritime security, the Presidents of the U.S. and Vietnam agreed to expand mutually beneficial cooperation in humanitarian capabilities, non-traditional

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<sup>112</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development, *Environmental Report – Dioxin Contamination at Bien Hoa Airport*, 2016, 2, accessed May 14, 2018, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/BH-Final-EA-2016-05-03\\_VN-reduced.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/BH-Final-EA-2016-05-03_VN-reduced.pdf).

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, “United States and Vietnam Cooperating to Enhance Humanitarian Demining Capabilities,” August 31, 2016, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/united-states-vietnam-cooperating-enhance-humanitarian-demining-capabilities/>.

security, and maritime law enforcement.<sup>114</sup> The Vietnamese Coast Guard, which was established in 1998, is the main law enforcement forces of Vietnam currently. As a new force, the Vietnamese Coast Guard does not have many opportunities to sharpen their skills and gain experiences. In order to meet the requirements of being able to control and administer the execution of laws within Vietnam's water, Vietnamese Coast Guard needs to be modernized in both equipment and skills. With ample experiences in coping with maritime laws enforcement, the U.S. obviously will help Vietnam in training and enhancing its Coast Guard capabilities, especially when Vietnamese Coast Guard just received six MetalShark patrol boats from the U.S. Furthermore, another force which will have benefits when doing mutual exercise with the U.S. is the Vietnam's Marine Force. With the mission of responding to any threats to Vietnam's shores and islands, Vietnam's Marine Force is currently lacking weapons and also experiences in amphibious tactics. In the circumstance of disputes over islands in the South China Sea, Vietnam's Marine Force will have valuable opportunity training with the U.S. Marine Corps to improve and enhance its capabilities in order to meet the requirements facing any threat to Vietnam's sovereignty in the South China Sea.

### Conclusion

The relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam is in the era of closer cooperation because of shared national interests. The South China Sea plays important role in the

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<sup>114</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Joint Statement: Between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," May 23, 2016, accessed May 16, 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/25/joint-statement-president-barack-obama-united-states-america-and-preside>.

collaboration between the two countries and the two militaries. The South China Sea is not only critically important for the U.S. and Vietnam in economy, but also in military, diplomatic, and information realms. Currently, the South China Sea is a region that has the potential risks of conflict, causing instability in the region. The bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam aims to maintain a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region, and support the mutual interests of the two nations. Even though there are number of obstacles for the further cooperation between the two countries and the two armies, it is obvious that the two nations will broaden, expand, and tighten the relationship in all spheres. Within various areas of collaborations, the military relationship plays a crucial role to support common interests of the two countries.

Using the four elements of national power, Army Design Methodology, and seven elements of negotiation, this thesis, based on analysis of current situation in the region and also about the situation of the U.S. and Vietnam, proposes several areas of cooperation between the two militaries. First, moving the obstacles in the relationship between the two countries include human rights and war legacies. Second, enhance professional military education and training in order to improve the interoperability of two militaries. Third, expanding the arms sales between two nations to achieve Vietnam's demanding requirements of a military capable to protect national interests. Also, the arms sales will help the U.S. achieves one of its strategic goals to tighten the relationship of a partner in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, and bring benefits to the U.S. economy. Fourth, broadening maritime joint exercises is critical in the circumstance that the two countries share many common interests in the South China Sea.



### Recommendation for Further Study

This research has highlighted some topics on which further study would be beneficial. First, in the research methodology, besides using qualitative method, the thesis would be beneficial if looking at some case studies such as the military relationships between the U.S. and Indonesia, and the U.S. and Malaysia. Those two case studies have some similarities in conditions with the military relation between the U.S. and Vietnam. Second, when looking on the components which impact the potential military relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam, there are several elements such as the economic conditions of Vietnam, and the effectiveness and difficulties for Vietnam when running two military systems simultaneously including U.S. and the Russia systems. In addition, an analysis about the advantages and disadvantages of the U.S. military weapons compared to others will clarify the potential for the U.S.-Vietnam military trade. Third, there are several other areas for the future military relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam which are not mentioned in this thesis. For example, navy logistics is feasible for the near-term cooperation between the two militaries. Also, parallel with the military weapons sales is the technology delivery. Be able to clarify those additional areas will help this topic being more multi-directional and adequate.

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