



2015 Pentagon Report: Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives - South China Sea, Japan, Senkaku Islands, Paracel, PLAN Navy, China's Spratlys Outposts

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Professionally converted for accurate flowing-text e-book format reproduction, this newly released Pentagon report provides an up-to-date status of American Asia-Pacific maritime strategy, with detailed information about ongoing competing territorial and maritime claims in the South and East China Sea.

The disputes revolve around three primary issues: (1) competing territorial claims among claimants, (2) competing maritime claims among claimants, and (3) excessive maritime claims asserted by some of the claimants. Regarding competing territorial claims, there are six claimants to the land features in the South China Sea: Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. There are three primary disputes over territorial sovereignty. The first is a dispute among China, Taiwan, and Vietnam over the sovereignty of the Paracel Islands, which China has occupied since 1974. The second is a China-Taiwan-Philippines contest over Scarborough Reef. The third is a multi-claimant dispute over the Spratly Islands, which includes more than 200 geographic features. China, Taiwan, and Vietnam claim sovereignty over all of the Spratly land features, while Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines claim sovereignty of only certain land features in the island group. Vietnam and Malaysia have yet to delimit fully their maritime claims in the South China Sea.

In particular, China is increasingly deploying the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) to enforce its claims over features in the East and South China Seas. China prefers to use its government-controlled, maritime law enforcement ships in these disputes, and operates PLAN vessels over the horizon so they are ready to respond to escalation. China has demonstrated this model during disputes with rival claimants over Scarborough Reef, Second Thomas Shoal, the South Luconia Shoal, and CNOOC-981 drilling operations south of the Parcel Islands. Since 2012, the CCG has maintained a persistent presence in areas including around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and Scarborough Reef in the South China Sea. Similarly, China has used MLE ships to restrict and put pressure on Philippine access to Second Thomas Shoal where the Philippines maintains presence via a grounded naval vessel, the Sierra Madre. Although China is not the only claimant to use non-military assets to conduct worrying or dangerous actions against rival claimants — for example, in 2013, members of the Philippines Coast Guard killed a Taiwan fisherman in waters claimed by both the Philippines and Taiwan — it has been, by far, the most active.

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