

China's Maritime Coercive Diplomacy in the South China Sea since 2011

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Lan Anh Nguyen Dang

aus **Thaibinh, Vietnam**

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Vorsitzende: Prof. Dr. Katharina Kleinen-von KönigsLöw
Erstgutachterin: Prof. Dr. Amrita Narlikar
Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Patrick Köllner

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Abstract

Over the past decade, China has increasingly employed maritime coercive diplomacy to pursue its objectives in the maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Relying on sea-based forces, primarily paramilitary forces, China has gradually changed the status quo in the South China Sea in its favour. Despite its superior power, however, China has not achieved all its policy goals by getting small Southeast Asian claimants to comply with its demands.

This dissertation examines China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea since 2011. It explores major contextual and tactical factors influencing the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in a comparative case study covering the 2011 cable-cutting incidents, the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the Second Thomas Shoal tensions in 2013–2014, the 2014 *Haiyang Shiyou* 981 oil rig crisis, the Spratly Islands land reclamation in 2013–2015 and the militarisation in the South China Sea since 2016.

This study demonstrates that the shift in the regional balance of power and the increase in material capabilities, particularly maritime law enforcement forces, have created favourable overarching conditions for China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea since 2011. Analysing five factors (asymmetry of power, asymmetry of motivation, the strength of U.S. deterrence, the domestic factor, and the clarity of compliance terms), this dissertation demonstrates that the combination of asymmetry of motivation in favour of small target countries and strong deterrent signals from the U.S. limits China's effective use of maritime coercive diplomacy. However, when the U.S. reaction and deterrence are slow and weak, China has made its coercive efforts successful in the form of *faits accomplis* relying on its rapidly growing material power and military capabilities. The domestic factors of public opinion and bureaucratic pluralism have had a limited effect on the implementation and the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy as well as Southeast Asian rival claimants' policies during the crises. Lastly, China's unclear terms of compliance and settlement constrain the possibilities for productive bargaining with its rivals.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CLCS	Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
CMS	China Marine Surveillance
COC	Code of Conduct
DOC	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FLEC	Fisheries Law Enforcement Command
FMPRC	Foreign Ministry of People's Republic of China
JP MOD	Japan Ministry of Defence
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PH DFA	Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SOA	State Oceanic Administration
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
U.S.	United States
US DOD	U.S. Department of Defence
US DOS	U.S. Department of State
USCC	U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VNA	Vietnam News Agency
VN MOFA	Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs
VOV	Voice of Vietnam

Chapter 1

Introduction

In his classic study *The Art of War* (400–320 BCE), the noted Chinese military theorist, Sun Tzu, wrote:

For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy...Next best is to disrupt his alliances...The next best is to attack his army...The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative.¹

The above passage reflects the ultimate aim of coercive political-military strategies: to subdue an enemy through the use of threats of force or limited use of force without resorting to an all-out war.

China has a long tradition of exploiting potential force for political purposes. Since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has, in many cases, employed coercive strategies to meet its policy objectives (Ayson and Pardesi 2017, 98). As early as 1950, China mobilised its military forces north of the Yalu River in an effort to send a deterrent message to the Truman administration not to cross the 38th parallel dividing the Korean Peninsula. To serve its Indochina policy, China maintained direct military pressure on Vietnam by stationing troops along the Sino-Vietnamese border, and carrying out attacks during the 1980s.² Between July 1995 and March 1996, People's Liberation Army (PLA) naval vessels and aircraft conducted a series of military exercises and missiles tests in the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait, the aims of which were to deter Taiwan from pursuing its independence from China, and to deter the U.S. from promoting Taiwan's independence.³

Since the mid-1990s, China has engaged in fewer military crises and since then, its coercion has been marked by distinct characteristics. Firstly, except for territorial disputes with Bhutan and India, by the late 1990s China had resolved land border disputes with 12 of its neighbours. Yet, none of its maritime disputes, over the Senkaku Islands with Japan, over the Paracel Islands with Vietnam, or over the Spratly Islands with a number of Southeast Asian claimants including Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia, have been settled.⁴ Therefore,

¹ (T. Sun and Griffith 1963, 77–78), translated by Samuel B. Griffith.

² For more on China's use of coercive diplomacy and the value of the strategy to China's Indochina policy, see: (Ross 1991).

³ For more on China's coercive diplomacy and its show of force in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, see: (Ross 2000; Scobell 1999)

⁴ China and India only signed an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China Border Areas in 1993, and an Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the military field along the LAC in 1996. The Chinese and Bhutanese governments only reached an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Sino-Bhutanese Border Areas

in order meet its immediate security objectives, Beijing has employed a strategy of coercive diplomacy with a focus on managing these maritime disputes and enforcing its claims in maritime East Asia. Secondly, given growing international norms against the use of military violence to pursue state policy, and the improvements in Chinese paramilitary and law enforcement capabilities, 'low level' coercive diplomacy has been increasingly seen by China as a useful tool and a palatable option to advance its interests in maritime disputes without risking armed conflict.⁵

In recent years, China's resort to maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea has become more noticeable, and has caught the wide attention not only of regional but also of international observers and policy-makers. Despite disagreements on exactly which year marked the turning point in China's shift to a more assertive maritime policy, scholars agree that there has been an undeniable rise in China's use of coercive diplomacy to advance its claims, and to force regional claimants to change their behaviour in maritime crises (Cronin 2014a, 26). There are ample examples of such coercive diplomacy.

The most recent example is the ongoing stand-off between Chinese and Vietnamese vessels within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) since June 2019. The Chinese Coast Guard vessel *Haijing 3511* operated in a "threatening manner" near Vietnamese offshore supply vessels in an effort to impede the drilling operation of a rig, the *Hakuryu 5*, which is contracted to drill in Block 06-01, an oil block in the northwest of the Vanguard Bank on the Vietnamese continental shelf (AMTI 2019b; Ng 2019b). At the same time, to put more pressure on Vietnam or "to punish Vietnam" for allowing the drilling in Block 06-01, in early July 2019 a government-run China Geological Survey vessel – the *Haiyang Dizhi 8* – was sent to the northeast of Block 06-01 to undertake an oil and gas survey (AMTI 2019b). *Haiyang Dizhi 8*'s operations and the presence of an escort of heavily armed Chinese Coast Guard vessels triggered a three-month stand-off and a new wave of tension between Beijing and Hanoi.⁶ Previously, in July 2017, Vietnam had reportedly decided to halt the oil drilling in Block 136-03 after China threatened to attack Vietnamese outposts on the Vanguard Bank. In less than a year, in March 2018, another major oil development project was again cancelled following pressure from China.⁷

According to Automatic Identification System data and the analysis of the Washington-based think-tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) under the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in late May 2019, a few weeks before the latest stand-off, a PRC Coast Guard vessel, the *Haijing 35111*, heavily patrolled the area around Luconia Breakers off the coast of Malaysia's Sarawak State. The *Haijing 35111* engaged in "intimidating behaviour" and

in 1998. China signed boundary treaties and agreements to solve frontier disputes on land with 12 neighbours: Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Laos, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. For more details on the settlement of China's territorial disputes on land with its neighbours, see: (Fravel 2008, 46–47; Hyer 2015; Elleman, Kotkin, and Schofield 2013)

⁵ For more on the rise of paragonboat diplomacy, see: (Le Mière 2014, 69)

⁶ For more on the stand-off between Vietnamese and Chinese vessels at Vanguard Bank and in the area the *Haiyang Dizhi 8* conducted oil and gas survey, see: (AMTI 2019b; Ng 2019b; Zhen 2019a; 2019b; RFA 2019; Collin Koh 2019; Pearson and Vu 2019; VOA 2019; *BBC News* 2019; *The Straits Times* 2019; *Viet Nam News* 2019; L. Zhou 2019).

⁷ For more on the suspension of Vietnam's oil development projects due to pressure from China in 2017 and 2018, see: (Hayton 2017b; 2018b; Pearson and Gloystein 2018; Glaser and Poling 2018)

circled two Malaysian oil and gas supply vessels in an attempt to prevent the *Sapura Esperanza* rig from the drilling operations (AMTI 2019b).

Furthermore, paramilitary force has been increasingly employed by the PRC to directly pressure and block other rival claimants from undertaking construction plans in the Nine-dash line, which demarcates China's claims in the South China Sea. Despite the 'appeasement policy' towards China adopted by the current Philippine President Duterte in August 2017, China dissuaded Manila from its planned upgrades on Philippine-occupied Thitu Island (known in the Philippines as Pag-asa) in the Spratly Island chain, with "a sudden and provocative appearance" of a flotilla of fishing, law enforcement and naval vessels within one to five nautical miles from Thitu (AMTI 2017e). At least since July 2018, a large fleet of Chinese ships from Subi Reef has been deployed to the area between Subi and Thitu and, during the first quarter of 2019 alone, more than 200 Chinese vessels have operated near and around Thitu Island.⁸

Over the past few years, without resorting to brute force, China's use of different types of coercive diplomacy, including the occasional low-level provocation by verbal threats, has already heightened tensions in the region. The U.S. is concerned that the use of coercive diplomacy will challenge both its interests and the regional order, while small states involved in maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea are struggling to balance two seemingly exclusive interests: maintaining stable economic relations with China, and effectively protecting their sovereignty and maritime interests. Some argue that maritime coercive diplomacy – beneath the threshold of armed conflict – has so far helped China gradually change the status quo in its favour. By contrast, the U.S. and its allies and partners have not had an effective policy to counter Chinese coercive diplomacy and expansion in the South China Sea. In fact, China has not, however, achieved all its policy goals by resorting to maritime coercive diplomacy. More precisely, not every demand that China has made to the small states it has targeted during crises in the South China Sea has been met.

Given the appeal of coercive diplomacy, by offering the chance of achieving reasonable objectives with less risk of unwanted conflict (George 1994a, 9), and the improvements in China's paramilitary and military capabilities, as well as its increased ability to project power, it is likely that maritime coercive diplomacy will continue to be utilised by China to advance its interests in general, assert its claims in the South China Sea, and manage the maritime disputes with its small neighbours. It is important, therefore, to understand China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy and the factors affecting the outcome of this strategy.

To examine this phenomenon, the available analytical tools drawn from the existing literature on coercion are, however, limited. Despite growing attention being paid to it, China's maritime behaviour has not been systematically studied within the general framework of Chinese security and foreign policy studies. The study of coercion has been a major focus of academic thinking in strategic studies, and it is not surprising that, starting from Thomas Schelling, the literature is focused heavily on understanding military coercion. Alexander L. George and William Simons importantly emphasise coercive diplomacy as a political-military effort which aims to

⁸ For more on the development of Chinese deployment of vessels near Thitu Island from 2017 to April 2019, see: (AMTI 2017e; 2019a; Bloomberg 2019; Mangosing 2019; Gomez 2019). For more on President Duterte's appeasement policy on China, see: (De Castro 2017)

persuade an opponent to stop, or to reverse, an action. However, their examples rely on the threat, or the actual use, of limited military force to achieve political goals. The only non-military coercion that attracts a great deal of attention in the existing literature is the use of economic sanctions. By and large, the literature on coercion leaves an empirical and conceptual gap regarding non-military and paramilitary coercion, which is increasingly used in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, in regard to a main actor attempting coercive diplomacy attempts, the existing literature primarily draws on the experience of the U.S. or Western powers during the Cold War or the decade following. The practice of this strategy by other actors, particularly non-Western and rising powers has been overlooked. Over the past decade, however, the employment of coercive diplomacy by rising powers such as China to further their interests within their neighbourhood, has attracted growing attention from observers and scholars in this field. Some aspects of China's maritime behaviour have been analysed under the overarching study of so-called 'grey zone' coercion. A number of such works can be listed such as, *Mastering the Gray zone* (Mazarr 2015), *Deterring China in the "Grey Zone"* (J. R. Holmes and Yoshihara 2017), *Tactics of Strategic Competition* (Jackson 2017) and the latest work published by RAND, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone* (Morris et al. 2019).

Nevertheless, even within Chinese security and foreign policy studies, China's maritime coercive diplomacy in general, and in the South China Sea in particular, has not been systematically studied. In part, existing studies on China's coercive behaviour are heavily influenced by coercion literature in which the analyses focus either on its use of force or its engagement in political-military crises before the mid-1990s. The only work to date that examines China's behaviour in foreign policy crises, including "near crises" in the past three decades, is *China's Crisis Behaviour* by Kai He (2016). However, rather than focusing on analysing China's coercive behaviour, he explores the conditions under which Chinese leaders take risks to escalate a foreign policy crisis or avoid risks to de-escalate a crisis. The foreign policy crises which are examined are not limited to those between China and its neighbours in maritime disputes, but also include crises between China and the U.S.

Since the tensions over maritime territorial disputes have risen in recent years, some efforts have been made to shed some light on China's 'low-intensity coercion'. The most notable work so far devoted only to China's grey zone coercion in maritime East Asia is *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia* by the CSIS in May 2017. This study examines nine incidents since 2009 in which China has used maritime coercion towards Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and the U.S. in both the East and South China Seas. Another study, *Echelon Defense: The Role of Sea Power in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy* by Ryan D. Martinson (2018) of the U.S. Naval War College, is worth mentioning since it provides a useful examination of the various ways in which China has utilised its sea power – including naval and coast guard forces – to develop a distinct approach to advance its maritime claims since 2006. The latest book to discuss Chinese maritime coercion is *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* (2019) edited by Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson. There is also a great deal of research on China's policy and behaviour in maritime disputes in the South China Sea. These current studies attempt to tackle three main issues of whether or not China has adopted a more coercive approach in the South China Sea, the timing of the shift in China's policy and the forces driving that shift. Despite these contributions, there are two important limitations to the existing studies on China's behaviour in South China Sea disputes. Firstly, these

studies more or less present cases and incidents in a descriptive manner that lack a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which coercive diplomacy has succeeded or failed to help achieve China's policy goals. Secondly, of the current incidents and crises, there is no comparative analysis on which to draw in order to highlight the major factors influencing the effectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy in managing the disputes with its neighbours in maritime Southeast Asia.

This dissertation therefore aims to examine China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy and highlight the key factors that have influenced its outcome in the South China Sea since 2011. In doing so, the dissertation seeks to answer two central research questions: What are major factors affecting the success or failure of China's maritime coercive diplomacy? How do these factors affect the success or failure of China's maritime coercive diplomacy? It also addresses the following sub-questions:

- What are China's objectives and demands when employing maritime coercive diplomacy?
- What coercive tactics and tools has China used in its strategy of coercive diplomacy?
- What is the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy? To what extent did China succeed or fail?
- What explains that outcome?

Exploring these questions is important in several ways. Firstly, as aforementioned, coercion below military thresholds has become more prevalent but is still under-theorised, and explaining and understanding the employment of maritime coercive diplomacy yields important theoretical insights into the study of conflict management and implications for deterrence theory at the level of "sub-limited" conflicts (Levy 2008, 544). Furthermore, the theory and the body of knowledge relating to the conditions that favour or impede the effective use of coercive diplomacy could only benefit from, and become further refined by, the study of additional cases in which it has been employed. To further advance the generic knowledge on coercive diplomacy, as the second-largest economy and a rising power in the world, China serves as an exceptional case to be studied. Secondly, within the analytic literature on China's foreign relations, an analysis of its use of maritime coercive diplomacy, its effectiveness and the factors influencing the result of this strategy will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Chinese coercive behaviours, as well as its conflict management strategy. Thirdly, from a practical perspective, on the one hand territory has been, and continues to be, the most contentious and salient issue in interstate disputes (Wiegand 2004, 3); territorial issues tend to have a greater probability of ending in war than any other sources of conflict.⁹ On the other hand, the South China Sea disputes not only involve a number of claimants, but are deemed as "the cockpit of geopolitics in East Asia" (ICG 2015, i) and, as Christian Le Mière notes, maritime diplomacy, including coercive maritime diplomacy, is one of the best indicators of changes in a global or a regional balance of power (Le Mière 2014, 3). An analysis of China's dispute behaviour will shed some light on the future of peace and stability between China and its neighbours, and that of the region as a whole. Only by understanding the nature of Chinese maritime coercive diplomacy and the factors influencing its effectiveness, can small states and the U.S. improve the chances for avoiding and containing future disputes with China in the South China Sea.

⁹ See works of (Huth 1996; Vasquez 1995; Diehl 1999; Diehl and Goertz 2001)

In this study, a comparative case study approach is used, because such an approach is useful for assessing the interplay of actions and reactions between China and its rivals in each crisis. Drawing on English- and Chinese-language open sources and Vietnamese internally-circulated materials, the study compiles a list of coercive behaviours undertaken by China in the South China Sea during the period from 1970 to 2017. This set of event data allows for the identification of the year 2011 as the turning point in China's maritime dispute management, because that year witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese coercive behaviours, and actions were also qualitatively unprecedented. Besides, since then a high frequency of maritime coercion has been sustained. Based on the event data, the study selects eight coercive actions, which are representative of this shift in China's dispute management in the South China Sea. They constitute major crises and incidents between China and other claimants in maritime disputes since 2011. They are grouped and examined in five overarching cases:

- The cable-cutting incidents, 2011
- The Scarborough Shoal stand-off, 2012
- The Second Thomas Shoal tensions, 2013–2014
- The *Haiyang Shiyou* (HYSY) 981 oil rig crisis, 2014
- China's Spratly Islands land reclamation, 2013–2015 and militarisation in the South China Sea, 2016–present

These cases provide a good degree of variation in the level of success of China's maritime coercive diplomacy: some were successful, some failed and one case was neither a complete success nor a total failure. Furthermore, some have a within-case variation; in other words, in some cases, the PRC was successful in achieving some objectives, but failed to get other claimants to comply with other demands. This selection will avoid the problem of selection bias, and allows an exploration of the conditions that favour China's maritime coercive diplomacy, as well as where the lack of conditions leads to the ineffectiveness of the strategy.

In order to explore the conditions that influence the outcome of the PRC's maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea, the study uses the method of 'structured, focused comparisons'. In the main, this method establishes its results by making comparisons among the selected cases and proceeds by examining a small number of cases, which are approached by asking a limited number of identical questions. This standardised set of questions or hypotheses ensures the comparability of results (George and Smoke 1974, 95–96; George and Bennett 2004, 67–72). The cases are then systematically compared. This method was devised to study historical cases in ways that would yield useful generic knowledge about important foreign policy problems (George and Bennett 2004, 67). The method can therefore help to analyse the phenomenon of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in ways that would draw the explanations for the outcome in each case into an overall understanding of the conditions that contribute to the success or failure of the strategy.

The selection of cases allows the employment of this method of structured, focused comparison. Following this method, a set of standardised and general questions is formulated, which is grounded in Alexander George and William Simons' 1994 general framework on coercive diplomacy (George and Simons 1994b) and Korina Kagan's refined framework on the situation of asymmetrical great-power/small-state coercion (Kagan 1998). These questions are asked of each case under study. The selected cases will then be compared systematically to point out the

conditions, or the extent to which contextual and tactical factors influence the effectiveness of the PRC's maritime coercive diplomacy.

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into ten chapters and a conclusion. Chapter Two highlights in more detail the gaps in the existing literature, and first reviews the conflict management literature on coercion, and the sub-literature on gunboat diplomacy. The second main section of chapter Two examines Chinese coercion and China's behaviours in maritime disputes in the South China Sea within the context of Chinese security and foreign policy studies. In each of these two main sections, the limitations and research gaps in the existing literature – which an attempt to examine China's maritime coercive diplomacy in maritime Southeast Asia seeks to fulfil – will be pointed out.

Chapter Three provides the conceptual groundwork for the study, and details the research design. It first lays out an analytical framework to examine China's coercive maritime diplomacy, starting with a definition of such diplomacy before discussing its attributes. This section also clarifies how the study will measure and assess the results or the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy strategy. Drawing on the existing literature, the next important sub-section is designed to identify some of the factors affecting the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy used by great powers toward small states. The methodology used in this dissertation is then presented and includes a set of standardised questions used to study the cases, a brief explanation about how the cases were chosen, and an introduction of the data and the sources used in the research.

Chapter Four outlines the general characteristics of the dispute in the South China Sea and an overview of China's maritime coercive diplomacy there. It begins with a brief overview of the South China Sea, then discuss China's claims and its declared policy regarding dispute management and settlement. Drawing on the data, the next section provides an overview on the PRC's use of maritime coercion in the South China Sea in the period from 1970 to 2017 and argues that 2011 was a turning point in dispute management China's policy there. The chapter concludes by selecting cases of incidents and crises, offering justifications for choosing these cases to carry out the 'structured, focused comparisons'.

Building on Chapter Three, Chapters Five through Chapter Nine analyse each of the cases of China's maritime coercive diplomacy as enumerated above. The structure of each empirical chapter will be designed with five sections, each one beginning with a background of the dispute between China and its Southeast Asian neighbours over the specific feature(s) or maritime area. This is then followed by a discussion of China's interests, capabilities and main objectives in employing maritime coercive diplomacy in the case. A detailed examination of China's execution of coercive diplomacy against the other claimant(s) is presented in the third main section. Then, an evaluation and assessment of the outcome, to highlight the extent to which China failed or succeeded in getting its publicly stated demands complied with by smaller states, is presented. By exploring the major factors of the asymmetry of motivation, some aspects related to the asymmetry of power, the commitment of the U.S. and its involvement during the crisis and tactical factors, the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy will be explained in the next main section. The final section summarises the main findings of China's exercise of maritime coercive

diplomacy, points out the important factors affecting the effectiveness of the strategy, and gives a brief explanation about certain variables which have a limited influence on its outcome.

Chapter Ten comprises a comparative analysis of the cases presented in the preceding five chapters and first argues that since 2011 an increase in material capabilities, particularly its maritime law enforcement forces, created a favourable overarching condition for China's increasing use of maritime coercive diplomacy to manage its disputes in the South China Sea. The second part of the chapter highlights several important characteristics of China's maritime coercive diplomacy and China's goals and coercive objectives in the South China Sea. The third main section analyses the multiple tools – ranging from paramilitary forces, navy and fishing vessels, to informal economic sanctions, to public and psychological pressure through the use of media – and the way in which these tools have been used in China's overall coercive strategy in the crises with other South China Sea claimants. An assessment of the outcome and conditions that influence the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy is the subject of the fourth section and considers all five factors: the asymmetry of power; the strength and asymmetry of motivation; the reaction of the external power; domestic factors; and tactical factors. It also examines the degree to which each factor influences the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy explored in previous chapters. The final section provides a general analysis of China's dispute management, U.S. strategy and the policies of other Southeast Asian contestants in the South China Sea.

The concluding chapter summarises the arguments and main findings of the research. It will present several different ways in which the dissertation contributes to the field of coercion and the study of China's international relations. The conclusion also includes potential directions for further researches, and policy implications.

Chapter 2

On coercion and Chinese security and foreign policy studies

The main purpose of this chapter is to review some relevant literature and discuss their utility and limitations. The chapter begins with the existing literature on coercion and the sub-literature on gunboat diplomacy. This section provides an outline of the origins, evolution and contribution of scholarly works to a better understanding of coercion and coercive diplomacy. It then points out the gaps in the literature, as well as highlighting some new approaches emerging from the most recent works to address these gaps. The next section covers studies that specifically examine Chinese coercion and gives an overview of the main issues in the current debate on China's behaviour in territorial maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The chapter concludes with some notes on limitations of this debate and research gaps into which a work on China's maritime coercive diplomacy and its effectiveness can fit.

2.1. Conflict management literature

This section provides an overview on coercion and gunboat diplomacy and highlights relevant gaps in the existing conflict management literature.

2.1.1. On coercion

Van Jackson offers a classical conception of rational coercion: "[w]hen scholars and policymakers think of coercion between states, they typically picture militaries sending unambiguous signals of resolve, employing military force or threat of force to achieve political aims" (Jackson 2015).

This is due to the fact that the roots of the concept lie in "the realpolitik tradition that views interstate conflict as dictated by considerations of power politics and prescribes bargaining strategies that demonstrate power and a willingness to use it" (Leng 1983, 381). With an assumption that there is no assurance of security in an insecure and anarchic world, states build up their military forces and gather allies to counter security threats. The use of force, escalating bargaining tactics, and displays of power are employed to deter an adversary from acting, or to compel them to change goals to match the pressing state's strategic interests (Maness and Valeriano 2015, 28; Vasquez 1993, 168; Leng 1993, 3–9).

In his 1966 *Arms and Influence*, Thomas C. Schelling provided the general principles underlying the strategy of coercive diplomacy, noting that it is based on "the power to hurt" and "the only purpose of the coercive use of the power to hurt is to influence the adversary's behaviour, to coerce his decision or choice" (Schelling 1966, 2–3). Coercion is thus distinguished from "brute force" and any strategies involving the full-scale use of force. In Schelling's words, while brute force, is a "unilateral 'undiplomatic' recourse to strength" and is simply getting what one wants by violence, coercive diplomacy is "based on the power to hurt" (Schelling 1966, 2–3). Coercive diplomacy "hurts the opponent but not as much as it might, leaving open the threat of even more pain if the opponent still does not comply" (Bratton 2005, 101). In other words, the full-scale use of force is to defeat an opponent militarily to enforce compliance, while coercive diplomacy is to get an opponent to comply without having been defeated first (P. V. Jakobsen 1998b, 14). Within

the existing literature, although coercion is distinguished from strategies involving the full-scale use of force, military force is deemed as a key component in coercive strategies, thus coercion is treated as one of the variants of the use of force to change an adversary's behaviour.

Whereas there is a consensus on the core issue of coercive diplomacy, which lies within efforts to change another's behaviours or policies by using threats, there is little agreement as to what determines success of coercion. This is the main focus of empirical studies on the practice of coercive diplomacy which in *Forceful Persuasion*, Alexander George systematically theorised. Here, the concept of coercive diplomacy is defined as backing one's demand with a threat or limited use of force to make an adversary halt a course of action upon which it has embarked, or undo what has already been done (George 1991a, 4). In a study of seven cases of coercive diplomacy employed by the United States namely: the 1961-62 crisis in Laos; the 1962 Cuban missile crisis; the 1965 confrontation with North Vietnam; coercive diplomacy against Japan in 1941, confrontations with Nicaragua and Libya in the 1980s; and the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf crisis, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (George and Simons 1994b) inductively seeks to identify the variables that influence the use of coercive diplomacy, and specify the conditions under which the strategy is likely to succeed or fail. This empirically grounded framework provides analysts and policy-makers with a basis for judging whether a strategy of coercive diplomacy is likely to succeed in a particular situation. All seven cases but one studied, however, took place during the Cold War, when the world politics was dominated by the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

With the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, the nature of conflict changed, and so *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Art and Cronin 2003) focuses on the way the U.S. employed limited military force to achieve its foreign policy goals during the dozen years after the end of Cold War. This volume added a further eight instances to the seven previously studied by George and Simon. The eight cases are: confronting warlords in Somalia in 1992–1994; reinstalling order in Haiti in 1994; freezing the nuclear weapons programme in North Korea in 1994; suppressing aggression and human rights abuses in Bosnia in 1995, and Kosovo in 1999; the Taiwan crisis in 1996; containing Iraq 1990–1998; and combating terrorism 1993, 1998 and 2001. With a record of the U.S. resorting to coercive diplomacy over a 60-year period, Art and Cronin (2003, 7; 2007, 299) argue that it is attractive to decision makers because “it holds out hope of big results with small costs”; coercive diplomacy is, however, hard to execute successfully.

Peter V. Jakobsen (1998) refines the general framework formulated by George and Simons to gain an insight into the strategy of coalitional coercive diplomacy, in which a coalition coerces opponents that have already resorted to force. Jakobsen develops an ideal policy framework to explain and predict coercive diplomacy outcomes with a minimum of success conditions on the basis of the coercer's actions: a threat of force to defeat the opponent or deny him his objectives quickly with little cost; a deadline for compliance; an assurance to the adversary against future demands; and an offer of inducements for compliance. This theoretical framework is then tested against three cases in which the Western powers used coercive diplomacy against military aggressors: against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, against the Yugoslav parties during the Yugoslav wars between 1992 and 1995, and against the military regime in Haiti between 1991 and 1994.

In further developing the study of coercion further, *Strategic Coercion* edited by Lawrence Freedman (1998, 3), acknowledges that a focus on the strategic choices of states in general, and of the U.S. in particular, is too narrow. This is one of the few studies that considers cases of coercive projects undertaken by actors other than the Western powers, such as factions (i.e. sub-state), state-sponsors, and multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN).

Particularly during 1960s and 1970s, a vibrant and robust literature emerged bringing theory and empirical analysis to the subject of how to use the diplomacy backed by the threat or actual use of force to pursue strategic interests. Despite the fact that students of the subject have developed and refined an understanding of coercion in general and coercive diplomacy in particular, there still exists some notable gaps. Firstly, except for the work of Freedman, case studies infer their theories and provide policy implications that are primarily based on U.S. experience or the practice of Western powers. In addition, such cases took place mainly during the Cold War or in the decade following.

Secondly, due to the increasingly indispensable role they play in today's global politics, rising powers – in particular China – are gradually coming into the picture. However, instead of looking at the ways China or other regional powers exercise coercive strategy, the majority of existing studies focus on how the United States might be able to deter China from using force in a manner inimical to U.S. interests (Shulsky 2000), or how to compel China to change its behaviour in a crisis situation (Schwab 2011). Given that rising powers are able to project their growing economic and/or military power to achieve their foreign policy goals, the understanding of how they tailor and execute a strategy of coercive diplomacy becomes more important and deserves a closer look. To date, there has been only one study: in a special issue in *Defence Studies* published in 2009, that has looked at cases of coercion employed by regional powers, such as China, Russia, India and Turkey (Aras 2009a; 2009b; Raghavan 2009; German 2009; J. R. Holmes 2009; Park 2009). Although this collection provides a much-appreciated attempt to address the issues raised when these actors resort to coercion, a more systemic and comprehensive study is needed.

Thirdly, although works on coercion have made valuable contributions to theorising this strategy, by and large, the coercion literature focuses on military coercion and leaves a conceptual and empirical gap regarding low-level provocations and para-military coercion.

Over the past few years, however, scholarly attention to low-level coercion has grown, and is examined under the overarching study of the so-called "grey zone" coercion.¹⁰ An important work that discusses such strategies is *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* done by RAND analyst Michael J. Mazarr (2015). In his view, grey zone strategies have three primary characteristics: to alter the status quo, to do so gradually, and to employ unconventional tools (Mazarr 2015, 4, 55–74). Van Jackson, from the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-

¹⁰ Some analysts refer these strategies as hybrid strategies, but many other scholars make the argument for a need to distinguish the concept of "grey zone strategies" from notions of hybrid warfare. They argue that although hybrid warfare operations or hybrid strategies involve the employment of a broad spectrum of tactics and tools ranging from high-end military operations to terrorism, criminality, cyberattacks, insurgency and more, grey zone strategies do not employ a direct and sizable use of force. For more: on hybrid warfare, see: (Hoffman 2007; 2014), and on the differentiation between the two, see: (Mazarr 2015, 43–77; Green et al. 2017, 21–25; Petersen 2019)

Pacific Centre for Security Studies, and James J. Wirtz, from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School contribute to the understanding of the grey zone by identifying 'short-of-war' strategies or the ways in which competitive gains are pursued while deferring the decision for war. According to Jackson (2017, 46–50), three tactics are employed: sidestepping established defender "redline" commitments, employing intermediary actors as aggressors, and presenting faits accomplis. Alternatively, Wirtz names them as the fait accompli, proxy warfare, and the exploitation of ambiguous deterrence situations (Wirtz 2017, 107–10). The latest work on this subject is *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone* (Morris et al. 2019). Published by RAND, this research provides a framework for distinguishing levels of grey zone actions and for conceptualising the grey zone challenge. Given the fact that the low-intensity coercive or grey zone strategies have become an increasingly important form of rivalry and statecraft, much more work is needed.

2.1.2. Sub-literature on gunboat diplomacy

One sub-section of the coercion literature that is highly relevant to this study is gunboat diplomacy. To a great extent, theorists of gunboat diplomacy were influenced by the research on coercion and diplomacy of force. The most influential work is *Gunboat Diplomacy* by James Cable, who defined it as "the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state" (Cable 1994, 14).

Alternatively, gunboat diplomacy is a form of coercive diplomacy carried out in peacetime or in less than war situations (P. K. Ghosh 2001, 2006). Cable categorised gunboat diplomacy into four modes. Definitive force is explained as an act or threat of force possessed of an authoritative purpose apparent to both sides, and it can be designed to create a fait accompli. The mode of definitive force is to remove the cause and thus solve the issue, for instance by destroying an area, breaking or maintaining a blockade or seizing/sinking ships (P. K. Ghosh 2001, 2011). Purposeful force involves limited naval force applied in order to change the policy or character of a foreign government. In this mode, "the force does not itself do anything: it induces the target to take a decision that would not otherwise have been taken" (Cable 1994, 33). Catalytic force is not so much a response as a readiness to respond to an unforeseen and/or unspecified menace (Cable 1994, 46–61; Mandel 1986, 62). Expressive force means using limited naval force in furtherance of the objective; in this case, warships are employed to emphasise attitudes or to make a point.

In criticising the term 'gunboat diplomacy' and attempting to incorporate all aspects of the political use of naval forces, J.J. Widen inclines towards the term "naval diplomacy" (Widen 2011). He argues that the term gunboat diplomacy is "too narrow, emotionally charged, and burdened by the history of nineteenth century colonialism" (Widen 2011, 717) and is, in fact, a specific and more aggressive type of naval diplomacy which involves explicit intimidation, deterrence and coercion usually conducted by a Great Power against a weaker state and in the latter's territorial waters (Widen 2011, 717). In other words, gunboat diplomacy is more one-sided and offensive in character (Widen 2011, 720). On the other hand, naval diplomacy is a wider and more neutral concept and not only refers to the use of naval force as a political instrument short of war, but includes all forms of coercive diplomacy by naval means, as well as different kinds of passive and subtle demonstrations of naval power (Widen 2011, 719). This does not mean, however, that all non-belligerent naval tasks or other kinds of political applications of naval force, such as expeditionary operations or humanitarian operations are included under the umbrella of the term

naval diplomacy (Widen 2011, 719–20). Another major difference between Widen's naval diplomacy and Cable's gunboat diplomacy is the location at which actions take place. While the latter often takes place in foreign territorial waters, the former is conducted in international waters, although in proximity to, and within effective range of, a potential opponent's territory (Widen 2011, 720). As Widen further elucidates, the aim of such sea-borne diplomatic operations is frequently just as much to support allies and friends, rather than to threaten and coerce the opponents (Widen 2011, 720).

Widen's approach to naval diplomacy has merits, as it covers subtle and passive forms of coercive diplomacy by naval forces. Increasingly in the contemporary world, coercive attempts have been conducted in which naval forces only play a supportive role, rather than becoming directly involved. States exercise these coercive attempts rather than resort to overt and aggressive gunboat diplomacy, either to challenge the status quo or to reinforce claims in maritime territorial disputes.

Although the approach suggested by Widen significantly points to less-aggressive uses of naval forces in the contemporary world, it does not consider the use of other sea-based tools to obtain political aims, that have become a strident feature of today's maritime coercion. One of the approaches following this line, is the work of Christian Le Mière, who re-defines gunboat diplomacy under new term of "coercive maritime diplomacy" as "the overt display, demonstration, threat or use of limited sea-based force by a state or non-state actor designed to coerce an opponent to further a political goal, often unstated, by compellence or deterrence" (Le Mière 2014, 27). Furthermore, he has added a sub-category of coercive maritime diplomacy in which the similar tactics are employed but with only non-military or paramilitary forces: "paragunboat diplomacy" (Le Mière 2014, 30). The approach to maritime coercion applied in this study is drawn from this work of Le Mière.

2.2. Chinese security and foreign policy studies

The following section examines Chinese coercion in Chinese security and foreign policy studies and outlines main issues in the current debate on China's behaviour in the maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

2.2.1. *On Chinese coercion*

Heavily influenced by coercion literature, the majority of existing studies on Chinese coercive behaviour often fall into the analysis of China's use of force and its behaviour in political-military crises. In order to explain such behaviour and its motives for going to war, one broad perspective on China's use of force adopts a calculative, unitary, rational actor model (Khoo 2011). Notable representatives of this approach are works of Allen Whiting (1975), Melvin Gurtov, and Byong-Moo Huang (1980), through which a consensus has emerged regarding the PRC's behaviour (Ross and Godwin 1993, 150). In a detailed analysis of the Korean War in 1950, the Sino-American confrontation over Quemoy 1958, the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s, the 1962 war with India, and the Sino-Soviet border clashes 1969, China is painted as a cautious, deliberative and calculating actor since its decision makers stress the utility of defensive and limited wars (Khoo 2011). Thus, force is used in a controlled manner and, after attempts to avoid war by sending signals have failed to deter its adversary, is considered only as a last resort.

Looking at the record of Chinese use of force during half a century (1949–2000) and Chinese doctrinal writings, Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky's *Patterns in China's Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (2000) argues that China's use of force may be guided by a strategic understanding that differs from that with which we are familiar, and that it relies on concepts in terms – such as deterrence and coercion – in ways other than which we understand the use of force (Burles and Shulsky 2000, vii). Chinese use of force has its own key characteristics namely surprise, psychological-political shock and opportunistic timing. The authors also assert that contemporary China tolerates considerable risk of escalation and exhibits a readiness to use military power (Burles and Shulsky 2000, ix).

In his examination of all cases of Chinese use of force prior to the mid-1990s, Thomas Christensen (2006) however adopts a pre-emptive and preventive war perspective to provide a comprehensive explanation to the question: under which conditions has China used force since 1949? Christensen applies the concept of “closing windows” to argue that Chinese decision makers use force, when they perceive a window closing for China in being able to achieve its strategic objectives, to reverse a deteriorating international situation, or to deter an adversary from becoming more aggressive. Taylor Fravel (2008) also uses preventive war theory to explain why China resorts to force. Although he focuses only on China's practice in territorial disputes, Fravel asserts that negative shifts in bargaining power are the most important factor influencing its willingness to use force in such disputes. China has used force in conflicts where it has occupied little or none of the land that it claims or has usually responded with force to signal its resolve to maintain its claims, if its adversary is seeking to improve its position in terms of the amount of disputed territory or local military balance (Fravel 2007).

Conventional approaches to Chinese use of force are not limited to examining the motives or conditions under which China resorts to force to achieve its political goals, rather some studies provide an overview of the evolution of Chinese military doctrine, as well as pay substantial attention to actual military operations undertaken by the PLA. In *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949* (Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt 2003), the argument is presented that to attain the operational initiative, Chinese strategists and military forces demonstrate a propensity for offensive operations using the elements of deception and surprise.

By and large, the examination of China's coercion comes under the broader study of its use of force, and existent studies thus focus largely on conflicts involving the military. As Kai He (2012, 4) notes, this is in part because China was indeed involved in numerous military conflicts with other nations during the Cold War period, however, since the end of the Cold War, it has not engaged in any overt military conflicts with other states. Instead, China has been involved in so-called “near crises”¹¹ or “quasi-crises”¹² (He 2016, 9). Furthermore, in recent years, one of the

¹¹ The concept of “near crisis” used in He's work on China's crisis behaviours is relaxed from the requirement from “possibility of involvement in military hostilities” of a “foreign policy crisis”. A near crisis refers to a diplomatic conflict or tension between two nations that approaches the intensity of a military crisis, but the possibility of military hostility is relatively low. See: (He 2016, 4).

¹² According to Chinese scholars, along with traditional interstate crises, crises can be further categorised as those that lead to war, those that remain on the margins of war, accidental crises and quasi-crises where

noticeable trends is that China has engaged in subtle forms of coercion to manage maritime disputes in its neighbourhood without directly employing military forces. Increasingly, the Chinese rely on non-traditional means, such as paramilitary forces, fishing vessels, offshore oil rigs, and island building (Jackson 2015). The coercive diplomacy exercised by China in foreign policy crises remains, however, under-theorised and under-analysed.

Nonetheless, some efforts have been made to achieve a better understanding of the coercive diplomacy exercised by China in the maritime domain. *China's Crisis Behaviour* by Kai He is one such effort. Among eight near crisis cases during the post-Cold War period under the Chinese leadership of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao examined by Kai He, three involve the adoption by Chinese leaders of a coercive approach in maritime disputes namely, the 2010 China-Japan 'boat collision' crisis, the 2012 Scarborough Shoal dispute and the 2012 Senkaku/Diaoyu nationalisation crisis. However, rather than paying attention to the outcome of China's use of coercive strategies, He's study seeks to explore the question of when, during crises, Chinese leaders chose coercive approaches over accommodative policies. Another effort to investigate China's use of coercion is by Patrick Cronin. He called the policy that China has employed to assert its claims in maritime disputes in recent years as "tailored coercion" (Cronin et al. 2014; Cronin 2014a). According to Cronin, this tailored coercion involves "a pattern of dialing up and dialing down coercive diplomacy and blending it with diplomacy, trade and investment, and other forms of engagement" (Cronin et al. 2014, 5). In short, China's tailored coercion "involves the persistent use of comprehensive state power short of force to expand control over its maritime periphery" (Cronin 2014b, 5). Its key aim is to put pressure on the target states and isolate them politically in order not to "spook the wider region" (Cronin et al. 2014, 5). Published in 2017 by the CSIS, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia* (2017) is the most notable study on this subject. It examines China's behaviours under the framework of grey zone strategy, which is defined as "an effort or series of efforts beyond steady-state deterrence and assurance that attempts to achieve one's security objectives without resort to direct and sizable use of force" (Green et al. 2017, 21). The scope of this study is not limited to maritime disputes between China and its neighbours in the East and South China Sea, but includes Sino-U.S. incidents. It examines nine incidents of grey zone coercion since 2009: the harassment of the USNS *Impeccable* in 2009; the Senkaku Islands trawler incident in 2010; the Scarborough Shoal stand-off in 2012; the nationalisation of the Senkaku Islands in 2012; the announcement of an East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone in 2013; the harassment of Philippines forces near Second Thomas Shoal in 2014; the HYSY 981 oil rig stand-off in 2014; the Spratly Islands land reclamation and construction beginning in 2013; and the "Top Gun" incident in 2014. From these, the study draws lessons for U.S. policymakers to counter coercion in the East and South China Seas, and has made a valuable contribution to the understanding China's maritime coercive attempts. In *Echelon Defense: The Role of Sea Power in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy* (2018), Ryan Martinson contributes to this subject by presenting the strategic context of China's echelon defence approach as well as by analysing the primary types of frontline operations conducted by the Chinese coast guard and navy to defend and advance its maritime claims. The latest study worth noting is *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* (2019) published by the China Maritime Studies Institute of the U.S. Naval War College. Using the grey zone conceptual framework, this edited volume also analyses China's coercive behaviours at sea; its contributors, however, provide a systematic understanding of how

sudden events in the context of somewhat conflictual relations precipitate a crisis but the probability of war is low (Yu 2008, 41–49; Johnston 2016, 32).

Chinese leaders think about the maritime grey zone, the ways China's paranaul forces are structured to conduct grey zone operations, and the tactics and tools employed in its maritime grey zone coercion. This study however does not take a case study approach, and therefore lacks an analysis of different incidents or a detailed comparison between them.

2.2.2. On China's behaviours in maritime disputes in the South China Sea

From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, most of the literature on disputes in the South China Sea is designed to analyse the historical and geo-political aspects of the disputes, as well as examine legal claims of all claimants.¹³ In regard to China's policy towards maritime disputes – notably, its occupation of Paracel Island in 1974 and clashes with the Vietnamese navy in 1988 in the Spratly Islands – are scrutinised mainly under broader analyses of China's use of force,¹⁴ whereas other scholars pay more attention to its accommodative approach to Southeast Asia, including the issue of the South China Sea disputes since late 1990s.¹⁵

Over the past decade, as the South China Sea disputes have once again become the main source of tensions between China and other Southeast Asian claimants, Chinese behaviour has attracted substantial attention from regional and international scholars as well as policy-makers. In the debate about its behaviour in the South China Sea during this period of time, three main questions being raised are: whether China's behaviour constitutes a new phase of assertiveness, the timing of changes in Chinese policy in the South China Sea, and factors explaining the adoption of a more assertive policy by the Chinese towards other claimants in the South China Sea disputes.

A new shift in China's South China Sea policy?

Whether there is a shift in China's policy towards maritime disputes in the South China Sea is one part of the recent debate among specialists on China's behaviour in its maritime peripheral domain. While some, like Dave Finkelstein, claim that the answer to this question is a straight forward "Yes" (Finkelstein 2011), others, such as Michael Swaine and Taylor Fravel, argue that interpreting recent Chinese assertiveness is by no means a simple and straightforward matter (Swaine and Fravel 2011, 14). In their 2011 *China Leadership Monitor* essay, Swaine and Fravel examine Chinese actions and diplomatic or legal statements – regarded by outside observers as the "most potentially troubling" since 2007–2008 – in order to assess whether, to what degree, and in what major ways China has become more assertive along its maritime periphery. According to their analysis regarding its disputed territorial claims, while delaying the resolution of disputes and maintaining a strong defence against perceived attempts by others to undermine China's position, China has not changed its basic, long-standing, two-sided strategy of avoiding conflict (Swaine and Fravel 2011, 14). Nevertheless, they agree that China's activities – ranging from the expansion of an annual unilateral fishing ban, regular maritime security patrols, planting markers on unoccupied reefs, to the conducting of scientific activities and extensive naval exercises –

¹³ Notable works on the historical, legal and geo-political aspects of the South China Sea disputes are: (Lo 1989; Austin 1998; Samuels 1982; Valencia, Van Dyke, and Ludwig 1997; Song 2002); works specifically on China's policy towards the disputes: (Sheng 1995; Roberts 1996; S. P. Kim 1998; Valencia 1995; Garver 1992; Jie 1994; Hyer 1995; Storey 1999)

¹⁴ For works focusing on China's use of force, including the cases of 1974 and 1988 see: (Christensen 2006; Fravel 2008; 2007)

¹⁵ For notable examples, see: (L. T. Lee 1999; Morton 2007)

represent more assertive approach by Beijing. They emphasise, however, that these activities are "not unique overall among the claimants in the South China Sea" (Swaine and Fravel 2011, 7). Sharing this conclusion, Alastair Johnston opines that the South China Sea is the only example "where China's diplomatic rhetoric and practice did shift fairly sharply in a more hard-line direction", but China's interests and preferences concerning its claims were unchanged (Johnston 2013, 19–20).

Björn Jerdén challenges the "assertive China narrative" and argues that it is a flawed idea. However, with regard to the South China Sea, by examining five cases between 2009 and 2010: the confrontation over the USNS *Impeccable*; the submission to the UN of a nine-dash line map; the imposition of a fishing ban; the activities of law enforcement vessels; and the PLA Navy's (PLAN) operations, Jerdén finds a partial adjustment to China's South China Sea policy during this period (Jerdén 2014, 70).

Along this line of argument, some Chinese scholars (D. Chen, Pu, and Johnston 2014; You 2013; F. Zhou 2016) contend that Chinese behaviour is assertive, but attempt to distinguish Chinese activities from the above understanding of assertiveness. Dingding Chen and Xiaoyu Pu disagree with Johnston's approach to assertiveness by arguing that it can embrace a positive connotation. Instead, they suggest three ideal types of assertiveness: first, offensive assertiveness in which a power uses coercion to expand its interest and influence without provocation from other countries; second, defensive assertiveness, in which a power employs its capability to defend, not expand, its growing interests; and third, constructive assertiveness, in which a power assumes a leadership role to solve regional and global problems. By applying this typology to maritime disputes, Chen and Pu argue that there is little evidence that China is engaged in offensive assertiveness, but instead adopts a defensive assertiveness (D. Chen, Pu, and Johnston 2014, 177–78).

Timing of the change in China's policy

Although even the sceptics contend that to some extent, China has taken a more assertive stance in its maritime disputes in the South China Sea, scholars are more polarised in the second and related issue of the timing of changes in China's policy. Andrew Chubb documents all Chinese assertive actions from 1970 to 2015, dividing them into three types: declarative, demonstrative and coercive. Using this event data, Chubb argues that the quantitative change in China's South China Sea policy started from 2007 and that qualitatively, 2007 marked a significant increase in coercive actions undertaken by China (Chubb 2016, 93–94; 101–3). Enumerating a series of activities, such as Chinese pressure on U.S. energy companies working with Vietnam, the establishment of the city of Sansha and the unilateral fishing ban, Carlyle Thayer (2011b), Tran Truong Thuy (2011), Peter Dutton (2011), Ian Storey and Clive Schofield (2009; Storey 2011), and Bonnie Glaser (2011) also chose 2007 as China's point of departure.

However, many other experts (Friedberg 2014; Johnston 2013; Fravel 2011; M. Li and Chan 2015) date China's assertive shift to 2009 and 2010, when efforts to consolidate its claims became more noticeable with the more significant presence of Chinese paramilitary in the South China Sea and the submission of a nine-dash line map to the UN. Moreover, the high-profile incident of Sino-American confrontation over the USNS *Impeccable* in 2009 convinced yet other

scholars (Michael Yahuda (2013), Sarah Raine (2011), and Thomas Christensen (2011)) that the shift in China's policy took place in that year.

Richard Turcsanyi argues that the international discourse claiming China's assertiveness as dating from 2009–2010 is exaggerated, and suggests that it only became assertive in 2011. According to Turcsanyi's study (2016), for events in the pre-2011 period, there was either no policy change or merely policy adjustments that constituted no qualitative change. Major events since 2011, such as the cable-cutting, Scarborough Shoal and HYSY 981-oil rig incidents, however, did manifest qualitatively new policy behaviours. According to Klaus Heinrich Raditio (2015), the shift even occurred later and argues that it was not until June 2012, when it occupied and effectively controlled the Scarborough Shoal, that China moved away from its reassurance policy in the South China Sea. The reason, as Raditio (2015, 323–24) explains, was that the occupation of a new land feature in the South China Sea violated the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), something that did not take place during the previous period of de-escalation.

For some scholars, China's behaviours in the maritime disputes in the South China Sea, for some scholars, can be divided into different phases, each possessing a distinct characteristic. After conducting interviews with more than two dozen analysts in China, Andrew Scobell and Scott W. Harold (2013) argue that China's assertiveness between 2008 and 2010 can be divided into two waves: from 2008 to early 2010, and from mid-2010 until December 2010. Carl Thayer also divides Chinese assertiveness into two main periods: from 2007 to the end of 2010, characterised as "assertiveness"; and the period from 2011 characterised as a new wave of "aggressive assertiveness" (Thayer 2011a; 2012f). Feng Zhang of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies in Hainan, China, however, identifies three phases of China's South China Sea policy: "reactive assertiveness" from 2009 to 2011; "forceful response" from 2012 to 2013; and "proactive adjustment" from 2014 to 2015 (F. Zhang 2016).

Drivers of China's coercive behaviour

The last and most important issue discussed in the literature on China's recent South China Sea policy is that if there is a shift, how can it be explained. Scholars offer a wide range of answers.

Gaining access to oil and gas reserves, as well as fishing and ocean resources is mentioned by some observers as one of the primary drivers behind China's growing assertiveness and activism in the South China Sea (Thayer 2011e, 3; Buszynski 2012; Dupont and Baker 2014). As a rising power, China has a great need for China to compete for external sources of raw materials to satisfy its expanding economy and power its manufacturing industries (Buszynski 2012; Dupont and Baker 2014). Moreover, it is attracted by the prospects of reducing its dependence on foreign imports of oil and gas through increasing offshore production (Buszynski 2012, 141).

Alongside natural resources, domestic factors are considered as another driving force behind China's assertiveness. The first is the nationalist sentiments encouraged and promoted by its leaders (Yahuda 2013, 454). Zhang Jian (2014) explains that profound domestic challenges facing the new Chinese leaders, ranging from economic stresses caused by the economic slow-down, social sources of instability arising from greater inequitable distribution of wealth, to

environment pollution and rampant corruption, have made “nationalist temptation irresistible” to justify their legitimacy. By taking a tougher stand abroad, particularly in regard to the highly sensitive sovereignty agenda which involves territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, Chinese leaders seek to divert the people’s anger and attention away from domestic difficulties (J. Zhang 2014, 395). The second domestic factor is Chinese bureaucratic pluralism (L. Jakobsen 2014; ICG 2012a). A variety of Chinese agencies, namely the PLA, organs of the Communist Party of China (CPC), coastal provinces, commercial enterprises and central government agencies, are involved in advancing China’s maritime interests. These actors are not united, and are believed to grasp every opportunity to gain commercial advantage, prestige, or government funding (L. Jakobsen 2014, 35). Rather than being part of a grand strategy, it is the fierce rivalry, sometimes competing agendas and ad hoc measures put forward by those actors to pursue their own interests which have impeded coordinated and effective governance, thereby causing China’s unsystematic and unpredictable actions in the maritime domain (L. Jakobsen 2014, 38).

Most of Chinese scholars, however, attribute China's assertiveness to the activism of other claimants in the South China Sea and U.S. policies in Asia – especially its "pivot" strategies after 2011. Scholars, such as Chen and Pu (2014, 177), You Ji (2013, 4–5), and Zhou (2016), all argue that Chinese demonstrations of an assertive postures is driven by, or a reaction to, events often initiated by other countries in the region, and that to protect China's maritime interests, assertiveness is needed to deter the further moves of others.

Aaron Friedberg claims that China's assertiveness in the maritime domain was neither reactive nor the result of domestic political forces, rather that China is "an essentially rational international actor that has chosen on the basis of strategic calculations to become more assertive" (Friedberg 2014, 142). Hence the increase in Chinese assertiveness is "a result of increasingly favourable leadership assessment of the nation's relative power and of the threats and opportunities that it confronts" (Friedberg 2014, 143). This view is commonly shared among observers who believe that a growing sense of self-confidence, born of two decades of sustained economic performance and perceived U.S. weakness after the 2008 global financial crisis, led to Beijing's assertiveness in the maritime domain (Storey 2011, 2).

According to the findings of Swaine and Fravel, China's greater assertiveness stems not solely from one factor, but from a wide range of factors including the increased capability to deploy more air and naval assets into or near disputed areas, the more active stance by other claimants, the growing numbers of subordinate governmental actors and the emergence of new and highly active popular and elite media resulting in greater pressure on the PRC's leaders (Swaine and Fravel 2011, 14–15). Yahuda also shares the view that China's behaviour is the result of various factors. Specifically, he argues that China's new assertiveness arose primarily from four related developments: its sense of a change in the balance of power in its favour; the expansion of its national interests to include the maritime domain; the growth of its military and paramilitary power to pursue the country's maritime claims more vigorously; and the heightening of nationalism among officials as well as among the population in general (Yahuda 2013).

From this review of the literature on China's coercive behaviour in maritime disputes in the South China Sea, some gaps can be highlighted. Firstly, the discussion on China's current South

China Sea policy revolves primarily around the rather ill-defined term of "assertiveness", which some equate with aggressiveness, while others take a more nuanced approach with a typology of assertiveness. It therefore leads to the fact that some aspects of China's policy and its behaviour have been exaggerated, while others have been downplayed. Secondly, despite the fact that some aspects of China's use of low-intensity coercion in maritime disputes have been examined under the overarching study of grey zone coercion, the existing literature lacks a systematic and comprehensive analysis of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. Thirdly, and importantly, the effectiveness or the extent to which China's coercive behaviours at sea has succeeded or failed to achieve its territorial and political objectives has not been fully addressed. Finally, there is no comparative analysis of the current incidents and crises from which to draw in order to identify situational and tactical factors influencing the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea.

2.3. Summary

Given the fact that states other than the U.S. and Western powers increasingly rely on coercive diplomacy to pursue their political aims, and that rising powers such as China have employed low-level coercion to advance their maritime claims in disputed areas in the South China Sea, it is important to gain better understanding of these strategies. However, the review of the existing literature on coercion and the sub-literature on gunboat diplomacy, as well as the literature on Chinese coercion and China's behaviours in maritime disputes, has shown that although low-intensity and paramilitary coercive diplomacy is still understudied in the existing literature on coercion, China's maritime coercive diplomacy has not been systematically studied within Chinese foreign and security studies. There has been no systematic comparison of incidents and cases in which China has resorted to maritime coercive diplomacy. Nor is there a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which China's maritime coercive diplomacy succeeded (or failed) to achieve its objectives during maritime incidents and crises; more importantly, a blank space remains in the existing literature on the determinants of its success or failure. Hence, by examining China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea, providing an evaluation of the effectiveness and highlight major factors affecting its outcome, this study is an attempt to fill these gaps.

Chapter 3

Analytical framework and research design

The core of this chapter presents a framework for analysis and the various elements of the research design that structure the study. It proceeds as follows: the first section introduces the ingredients of coercive diplomacy in general and a definition of maritime coercive diplomacy in particular. Then, drawing on coercive diplomacy theory, the variants of coercive diplomacy and the factors affecting its outcome will be presented. The second section provides a detailed explanation of the methodology of inquiry pursued in the remainder of the study, addressing case selection issues as well as data sources.

3.1. Maritime coercive diplomacy: Analytical framework

This first section presents an analytical framework which is constituted by a definition of maritime coercive diplomacy, variants of the strategy, how to define effectiveness and success of the strategy, and factors influencing the outcome of the use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

3.1.1. Coercive diplomacy

Coercive diplomacy is one of many threat-based strategies employed to influence another's choices without waging a war. The general idea of coercive diplomacy, in Alexander George's words, "is to back one's demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for noncompliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with the demand" (George 1991a, 4). At the core of the strategy, "the threat of pain tries to structure someone's motives" and "is the very exploitation of his wants and fears" (Schelling 1966, 3). "It is a threat of damage or of more damage to come, that can make the adversary yield or comply" (Schelling 1966, 3). In other words, a coercive diplomatic strategy aims at "affecting the opponent's will and his utility calculations" (George 1991c, 17). As an alternative to a reliance on military action, coercive diplomacy is, thus, an attractive strategy for policy makers because it "offers the possibility of achieving one's political objectives economically" (George 2003, vii). States use coercive diplomacy to achieve limited foreign policy goals. Coercive diplomacy therefore has three important dimensions: signalling, bargaining and negotiating (George 1991c, 17).

Coercive diplomacy is used more or less interchangeably with 'compellence'. Schelling created a dichotomy between compellence and deterrence. In terms of the objective of the threat, as Schelling points out, deterrence involves attempts to prevent the opponent from taking a course of action in the first place due to a fear of the consequences. The deterrent threat only changes the consequences if the act to be deterred is then taken (Schelling 1966, 72). The objective of compellence, in contrast, is to initiate action, to instigate the opponent either to do something that he has not yet undertaken or stop doing something that he has already undertaken.¹⁶ As to timing, deterrence involves explaining what must not be done and the possible consequences – then waiting. Deterrence thus tends to be indefinite in its timing. On the contrary, compellence has to

¹⁶ For more on the different use of force in compellence and deterrence, see: (Art 1993, 4–7)

be definite (Schelling 1966, 72). George follows Schelling's distinction, though he goes a step further in categorising the use of threats. George subdivides compellence into two concepts: coercive diplomacy and blackmail. The basis to distinguish one from the other is the offensive or defensive nature of the use of coercive threat. Blackmail is a strategy that involves "offensive uses of coercive threats to persuade a victim to give up something of value without putting up resistance" (George 1994a, 7). Coercive diplomacy conceptualised by George, in contrast, involves defensive uses of coercive threats. It is a defensive strategy that "is employed too deal with the efforts of an adversary to change a status quo situation in his own favour" (George 1994a, 8).

Even though the frameworks of Schelling and George are of importance for the understanding of the different methods in which threats are used as an instrument of policy, the dichotomy of compellence (coercive diplomacy)/deterrence and offense/defence are not unproblematic. First, as Byman and Waxman (2002) and Freedman (1998) argue, to distinguish compellence from deterrence in practice is difficult. Schelling himself is also aware of circumstances in which one bears some characteristics of the other. That is, when an attempt is made to deter the continuance of an action or approach of the opponent. He cites such examples as "harassment, overflight, blockade, occupation of some island or territory, electronic disturbance, subversive activity, holding prisoners" (Schelling 1966, 77). Such an attempt contains the elements of both deterrence and compellence. Furthermore, reversing a completed action versus deterring a future, planned action is hardly clear-cut, because both ultimately influence the opponent to choose a different policy that it might otherwise (Byman and Waxman 2002, 7). Both deterrence and compellence are the two sides of the same coercive coin (Freedman 1998b, 15, 32). Second, the distinction between an offensive and defensive posture rests on the assumption that the status quo is legitimate, and that all the attempts at change are wrong (P. V. Jakobsen 1998b, 13). Given the fact that in most conflicts, and particularly territorial disputes what is defensive to one actor will be regarded as offensive by the other, few actors to those conflicts would subscribe to this view (P. V. Jakobsen 1998b, 14).

Therefore, three points within the concept of coercive diplomacy used in this study require clarification. First, deterrence and coercive diplomacy/compellence are not rigidly separate approaches, which better serves the purposes of a study on Chinese behaviour. In cases when China backs its diplomacy with the use of military and/or paramilitary forces in the South China Sea, it can be argued that China's behaviour contains the elements of both deterrence and compellence. With one signalling move, China conveys to both its direct target and any third party (or the indirect targets) a compellent and deterrent threat respectively. Further, deterrent and compellent threats can be used at different phases in a conflict (P. V. Jakobsen 1998b, 12). Second, in the security environment of the region of East Asia, particularly in territorial disputes between China and its neighbours, even policies that one state believes to be defensive are frequently viewed by its adversary as offensive (Fravel 2007, 50). Accordingly, this study will not subscribe to traditional offensive and defensive distinctions that denote the defensive nature of coercive diplomacy strategy. Finally, the study uses the term coercive diplomacy, rather than compellence or strategic coercion, because it wants to emphasise the political-military (and paramilitary) aspect of the strategy.

3.1.2. Maritime coercive diplomacy: Ingredients and definition

As mentioned in the Chapter Two, Christian Le Mière provides a new approach to better understand the low-level type of coercion to the maritime domain. Le Mière puts forwards three arguments on principles to re-define gunboat diplomacy.

The first is related to the actors involved and tools used. While James Cable believes only nation states and their navies can engage in gunboat diplomacy, Le Mière argues that there is no particular reason why gunboat diplomacy must be undertaken by navies (Le Mière 2014, 16). In Le Mière's words, "other governmental agencies are feasible representatives through which to manage international relations with limited maritime force" (Le Mière 2014, 16). "Coastguards, constabulary agencies and even unofficial non-state organisations offer deniability, flexibility and 'containability' when they attempt to further foreign policy goals through force" (Le Mière 2014, 17). Other civilian maritime assets, such as fishing fleets and offshore oil rigs, can be commandeered or persuaded to sail to or to be placed in certain locations, and can therefore be useful tools for a willing actor (Le Mière 2014, 17).

In the second principle, Le Mière contends that Cable is right to suggest that all acts of gunboat diplomacy should involve at the very least a threat of the use of force (Le Mière 2014, 18). However, according to Le Mière, this threat needs not be explicit. In reality, it is the possibility and implicit threat that can also influence another's behaviour and policy (Le Mière 2014, 18). Thus, Le Mière argues for more subtle forms of gunboat diplomacy. "The sheer demonstration of an actor's capabilities (not intent) can act as a form of gunboat diplomacy, signalling to another party the ability to act if provoked, and therefore the damage that will be done to the other party should this situation occur" (Le Mière 2014, 18). At its most passive, according to Le Mière (2014, 18–19), "a naval force may simply be showcasing its capabilities to an adversary in order to deter an attack".

The third principle that Le Mière raises is related to target states and the goal of gunboat diplomacy. Le Mière argues that in the most passive forms of gunboat diplomacy, such as the demonstration of the capabilities of a maritime force, there is not necessarily a dispute in play or a clearly identified target (Le Mière 2014, 20). Concerning the goal of gunboat diplomacy, it is meant "to manage external relations and to affect the policies of other actors" through the use or threat of limited maritime force (Le Mière 2014, 20). It is this political goal that defines whether an event may be described as gunboat diplomatic or not (Le Mière 2014, 20).

Based on these principles, coercive maritime diplomacy is defined by Le Mière (2014, 27) as "the overt display, demonstration, threat or use of limited sea-based force by a state or non-state actor designed to coerce an opponent to further a political goal, often unstated, by compellence or deterrence". Drawing on this approach, this study defines maritime coercive diplomacy as *an attempt or series of attempts to influence the target(s)' behaviour(s) or policy(ies) through the display, demonstration, threat or use of limited sea-based forces to achieve policy goals*.

There are four points worth noting about the characteristics of maritime coercive diplomacy. First of all, this study uses the term 'maritime coercive diplomacy' instead of 'coercive maritime diplomacy', merely to emphasise that maritime coercive diplomacy is a type of coercive

diplomacy applied in the maritime domain, rather than a type of maritime diplomacy.¹⁷ The difference in terms of substance between the two, however, is not highly distinct.

Second, regarding actors, the maritime coercive diplomacy activities defined in this study must be undertaken by government agencies. In reality, a flotilla of fishing vessels can be deployed to disputed areas, but it is only as part of a state-led strategy to reinforce claims and harass other claimants' resource-exploiting activities that it will be considered maritime coercive diplomacy. Otherwise, events which involve only fishing boats from both sides, even when engaging in harassment, will not be covered in this study. In other words, coercion is state behaviour.

Third, the definition deliberately uses the term 'sea-based forces' drawn on Le Mière's approach. Sea-based forces include naval ships, paramilitary ships, such as coast guard and maritime militia vessels, armed fishing vessels, offshore oil rigs, and dredgers. Maritime coercive diplomacy must involve the display, demonstration, threat to use and/or limited use of at least one of these forces. This is a departure from the conventional approach to gunboat diplomacy and coercion in general, which mainly involves the use of naval ships and conventional military forces. This new approach of maritime coercive diplomacy not only includes a wider range of maritime assets used in the strategy, but also covers a broader range of incidents in which these maritime assets are employed to achieve political goals. Maritime coercive diplomacy activities can range from the use of limited naval forces to attack or occupy disputed land features at sea, military exercises in contested areas, blockades to harassment, physical interference with foreign activities, deployment of offshore oil rigs with the support of navy and paramilitary forces, to construction works in disputed features. It is worth noting that coercive diplomacy can include, but need not, include economic sanctions, political isolation, diplomatic sanctions, cyber-attacks, and even positive inducements.

Last but not least, as mentioned above, maritime coercive diplomacy as used here includes both deterrence and compellence. Thus, the target may be asked not to initiate an action; or to stop what he is doing; or to undo what he has done – that is, to reverse what he has managed to accomplish; or may even be persuaded to take action – that is, to do something entirely new. In some cases, the coercing state's objectives can be to induce an adversary to both stop and reverse an action.

3.1.3. Variants of coercive diplomacy

According to George (1991a, 7–9; 1991b, 385–86; 1994c, 18–19), there are four variants of the strategy of coercive diplomacy: ultimatum, tacit ultimatum, gradual turning of the screw and the try-and-see approach. First, the 'starkest' variant is the ultimatum, which has three elements: a

¹⁷ In discussing maritime diplomacy, Le Mière defines it as the management of international relations through the maritime domain. With regard to the forms of maritime diplomacy, he includes coercive maritime diplomacy, as well as co-operative maritime diplomacy and persuasive maritime diplomacy. While the former encompasses missions, such as port visits, joint exercises, training and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and seeks to build either influence, coalitions and alliances or confidence, the latter aims to increase recognition of one's maritime or national power, building prestige for the nation on the international stage as well as persuading others that one's own navy is present and effective. See more in: (Le Mière 2014, 7–13)

specific, clear demand on the target; a time limit for compliance with the demand; and a credible threat of punishment in the event of non-compliance.

The second variant of coercive diplomacy is the tacit ultimatum. In the tacit ultimatum, no deadline is provided, and the threat of punishment may be left open. In short of a classic ultimatum, a state can convey the sense of urgency and indicate the nature of the punishment by other means.

The third variant of coercive diplomacy has been called the "gradual turning of the screw". This version of the strategy also lacks a sense of time urgency for compliance. It, however, steps up pressure with a threat that punishment will be increased gradually and incrementally until specific demands are met.

The fourth variant of coercive diplomacy is the "try-and-see" approach. Except for a clear demand, the coercing state does not set forth a time limit or a strong sense of urgency for compliance. Instead, the coercer engages in one limited coercive threat or action and waits to see whether it has the desired effect before delivering another threat or taking another step.

In practice, the coercer may shift from one variant of coercive diplomacy to another. Also, while the ultimatum is the most powerful and the try-and see approach is the weakest, the coercive impact of any particular form of the strategy and whether it will be effective both depend on additional factors (George 1991a, 9; 1994c, 19).

3.1.4. Coercive diplomacy outcomes: Defining success

Coercive diplomacy is characterised by an attempt or series of attempts to influence the target(s)' behaviours or policies to achieve policy goals. Robert Pape posits that the success or failure of coercion rests in the decision of the target state (Pape 1996, 12–13). As Gary Schaub states, coercive diplomacy "can be said to have succeeded when the target actor bends to the wishes of the initiating actor, and to have failed if the target actor successfully ignores the initiator's threats and the initiator retreats, or if the initiator finds it necessary to actively engage in carrying out its threat to obtain compliance with its wishes" (Schaub 1998, 44). In addition, success and failure also depends upon the number of objectives. The coercer can have multiple goals as they pursue coercive strategies. Nonetheless, there is generally a hierarchy and relative priority among the demands. If the target concedes to the most significant demands, "success" can be said to occur; or in the opposite scenario, "failure".

Given the fact that this study examines the maritime coercive diplomacy directed toward the management of territorial disputes, maritime coercive diplomacy is coded as a success if the target state concedes to a significant part of the demands; or if the coercer establishes a new status quo in territorial disputes, without triggering a military retaliation from the target states. The latter implies that the target states are successfully compelled to accept a change in the status quo created by the coercer, because the target states cannot return to the previously existing situation without escalating to a military confrontation. Similarly, coercive diplomacy is termed a failure if the coercer backs down without its demands being met or if the episode leads to a military confrontation. Of course, intermediate outcomes in which some compromise between the initiator and target has been reached will be difficult to assess. Applying Gary Schaub's approach, this study argues that if the behaviour of the target is altered in the direction desired by the initiator, even to

an intermediate degree, we can say that coercive diplomacy was partially successful (Schaub 1998, 45).

3.1.5. Factors affecting coercive diplomacy

The outcome of the use of coercive diplomacy can be affected by many different variables. While some conditions enhance the likelihood of its effectiveness, there are many circumstances under which the efforts to employ coercive diplomacy are unlikely to achieve policy goals. Scholars in the field have long made efforts to identify and investigate various factors affecting the prospects for success.

Thomas Schelling identifies five necessary conditions under which coercion is most likely to be effective: first, both the coercer and the target have at least some interests in common, even an interest as minimal as wanting to avoid mutual damage; second, the threats need to be credible so the target believes that the coercer will carry out the threats that it makes in case of non-compliance; third, the threat must be sufficiently potent to convince the target that the costs of non-compliance will be unbearable; fourth, the target must be assured by the coercer that compliance will not result in more demands in the future; fifth, the target must be provided with a feasible time table under which to comply with the demand (Schelling 1966, 1–4, 69–89; P. V. Jakobsen 1998a, 66). Schelling, however, states clearly in the introduction to *Arms and Influence*: "I have used some historical examples, but usually as illustration, not evidence" (Schelling 1966, vii). He does not try to provide policymakers with specific policy prescriptions nor to confront his conditions with empirical evidence (P. V. Jakobsen 1998a, 66).

George and Simons' model of coercive diplomacy operationalises Schelling's abstract principles. According to their model, there are at least five contextual variables, which determine the planning of a suitable strategy, and nine favourable variables, which determine the execution of this strategy (George and Simons 1994a, 270–74, 279–88).

Contextual variables include the following: first, global strategic environment, which refers to the distribution of power in the global system; second, type of provocation that triggered the confrontation, which can be a fait accompli action or other forms of aggression, such as the violation of recognised boundaries or a flagrant disregard of norms or international law; third, an image of war the crisis triggers; fourth, unilateral or coalitional coercive diplomacy; fifth, isolation of the adversary because, in many cases, the target is not an isolated state but receives diplomatic and military support from its allies.

Conditions favouring success entail: first, clarity of objectives and demands, which means clarity with respect to what is to be achieved through coercive diplomacy; second, strength of motivation, which refers to the coercing power's perceptions of its stakes and interests; third, asymmetry of motivation, which is the relative motivation of the two sides; fourth, sense of urgency; fifth, strong leadership; sixth, domestic political support, which can come from political parties, and/or the public; seventh, international support; eighth, the opponent's fear of unacceptable escalation; and ninth, clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement of the crisis.

This framework provides a 'check-list' of useful questions to ask when analysing the strategy of coercive diplomacy empirically. It, however, suffers from several main weaknesses.

First, as Korina Kagan (1998, 90) and Peter V. Jakosen (1998a, 70) argue, the large number of variables (14 altogether) reduces the utility of the framework and "makes it unwieldy as an analytical tool". A second problem is that these variables are stated in forms both too general and too abstract (P. V. Jakobsen 1998a, 69; Kagan 1998, 90). Thirdly, and related to the second problem, some factors overlap. To some extent, several factors that affect the policy makers' choice in the first place are mixed with conditions favouring the success of the strategy, for example 'global strategic environment', 'the isolation of the adversary' and the 'international support' (Kagan 1998, 90). Similarly, other pairs as suggested by Kagan (1998, 90–91) can be combined, for example 'strength of motivation' and 'asymmetry of motivation', 'image of war' and 'fear of unacceptable escalation', and 'clarity of the objective' and 'clarity of concerning the terms of settlement of the crisis'. A fourth shortcoming results from the fact that the framework is solely based on the U.S. experience of military conflicts during the Cold War. The framework, therefore, has lost some relevance in analysing the coercive diplomacy employed by rising powers in non-military-oriented crises. For instance, China has largely engaged in foreign policy crises in the South China Sea relying on para-military forces. Since the immediate prospect of war is unlikely for both China and its target, the 'image of war' is no longer "one of the most important of the contextual variables" as noted in George and Simons' framework (1994, 273).

Korina Kagan (1998), whose concern is the conflicts between great powers and small states, refines the variables offered by George and Simon. Kagan (1998, 91–95) identifies two types of factors – situational and tactical. Situational (also described as contextual or background) factors derive from the structure or configuration of the situation in which a strategy of coercion is employed. They are neither the result of the coercer's own decisions or choices, nor are they under its direct influence. Rather, these factors are part of the situation the state engaged in coercive action must face (Kagan 1998, 91). In an asymmetric conflict between a great power and a small state, four key situational factors may bring about a failure of coercive diplomacy strategy: first, the asymmetry of motivation in favour of the coerced, which reflects the underlying balance of important intrinsic or reputational interests between the parties in the issue at stake; second, domestic constraints on the coercer; third, external support for the coerced small state; fourth, the intransigence on the part of the coerced based on ideological, domestic-political, or cognitive factors.

In contrast to situational factors, the tactical factors are the result of the coercer's own decisions and choices with regard to the implementation of a coercive strategy (Kagan 1998, 94). The tactics may be either tough or soft. Toughness might be manifested in high and urgent demands on the coerced; severe, explicit and public threats backed by exemplary force; and a lack of 'carrots'. On the contrary, softness may indicate mild, low-urgency demands, vague limited threats, the provision of positive inducements, and no display of force (Kagan 1998, 87, 95).

Kagan's historical case studies suggest that situational or contextual factors provide a more important explanation than tactical variables for the coercive diplomacy outcome in general, and great power coercion against small states in particular. Kagan argues for the primacy of situational over tactical factors for three main reasons. First, situational factors are more clearly related to the outcome of coercive diplomacy, while the relation of tactical factors to the outcome is more indeterminate. Second, background conditions constitute the basic underlying context of coercion and provide necessary (though insufficient) conditions for success. Good tactics and diplomatic

skill can make a difference, but not to the extent of overriding unfavourable background conditions. Third, a choice of tactics is often guided by, and derives from, the situational context (Kagan 1998, 87).

Drawing on these frameworks, this study will take into consideration some following factors and examine their effect on the success and failure of coercive diplomacy strategy.

The asymmetry of motivation. "Motivation is a two-sided matter" (George and Simons 1994a, 281). The relative motivation of the two actors, as George and Simon argue, plays an important role in determining the outcome of coercive diplomacy. The strategy is more likely to be effective if the coercing state is more motivated than the coerced due to what is at stake in the crisis (George and Simons 1994a, 281). What is critical in this respect, according to George and Simons (1994a, 281), however, is that if the coerced believes the coercing power is less motivated in the achievement of its crisis objective, an attempt at coercive diplomacy might end in failure. In territorial disputes, the disputed territory closer to the coerced state's homeland or resources of economic or military significance to the small state can motivate the small state's decision makers to accept the costs and risks inherent in steadfastly pursuing counter-coercion. While George and Simons argue that in some cases the asymmetry of motivation is determined solely by the nature of the conflict, they also assert that a player can create an asymmetry in one of two ways: by demanding of the opponent only what is essential to protect its own vital interests and not making demands that engage the vital interests of its adversary; and by offering a carrot that reduces the adversary's motivation to resist its demands (George and Simons 1994a, 281). To determine which side is favoured by the asymmetry of motivation, it is necessary to gauge three elements: the coercer's motivation to escalate, the magnitude of its demand, and the target's will to resist (Mulvenon 1995, 75).

The reaction of external actors to the coercive diplomacy attempt. This factor implies the extent to which other great powers' interests are engaged in these issues, which might include the external support available to the weaker state and/or a broader regional security commitment of the dominant power. A small state may prove difficult to coerce due to available external support (Kagan 1998, 93). This argument is in accordance with the balance-of-threat theory that claims that small states are more likely to balance against rather than bandwagon with the threatening power when useful external great-power allies are available (Walt 1987, 30, 175).¹⁸ The involvement of another great power can impact on the outcome of coercive diplomacy in two ways. The first and most commonly seen pathway is that the support from another great power can embolden a small state to resist and undermine the coercive effort. The second way is that the external great power may employ effective counter-coercion and deter the coercing great power from carrying out its threat, thus obliging it to choose between dropping its demands on the small state, or risking the escalation of the crisis into a major war with a great-power opponent (Kagan 1998, 93–94). The prospect of foreign intervention can restrain the coercive diplomacy efforts and limit the strategy's effectiveness. On the contrary, without the involvement or weak deterrence from the dominant power, small states may lack countervailing power and find it less risky and more effective for the effort to use coercive diplomacy to advance the coercing great power's interests.

¹⁸ On balance-of-threat theory and small states, see also (Labbs 1992).

Regarding three situational factors namely balance of power, domestic constraints on the coercer, the intransigence of the coerced, and tactical factors, the study will examine these factors to a certain degree and assess their effect on the outcome of China's use of coercive diplomacy.

Asymmetry of power. Concerning the asymmetry of power between the coercer and the coerced, in the discussion of great-power coercion against small states, like Kagan's work, the asymmetry of capabilities is constant, even growing over time. Despite its overwhelming preponderance of power, in many cases, great-power coercive diplomacy fails despite an asymmetry of capabilities in favour of the coercer (Kagan 1998, 91–92). Alternative explanations instead of asymmetry in military power thus are needed to explain the failure of coercion. However, it is arguable that in the case of the success of coercive diplomacy, the asymmetry of power can play a major role. The preponderance of capabilities can increase the coercer's motivation to fight or escalate the crisis, while it causes the small target to fear an unacceptable escalation, which importantly affects the asymmetry of motivation and leads to the final success of coercive diplomacy. Therefore, to some degree, this study will still examine the increasing asymmetry of power and assess the extent to which its growth impacts the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy strategy.

Domestic factors. With regard to domestic factors, George notes (1994a, 284) that a certain level of domestic political support is needed for any serious use of coercive diplomacy. In contrast, domestic constraints may prevent the coercer from making credible threats or backing them with exemplary force, having political support at home may help efforts to coerce the target (Kagan 1998, 92). For the target, domestic political constraints may involve a fear by the government of losing public support and suffering electoral defeat if it gives in to the coerced. Such constraints prevent the small state from submitting to the coercing power's demands (Kagan 1998, 93). These factors are typically more relevant in the case of the democratic countries (Kagan 1998, 92). In the case of China and Vietnam, they are both authoritarian regimes and do not face elections. Some argue that the top leadership exercises considerable control over the mass media and can generate public support for anything to serve its diplomatic purposes (Liao 2016, 826; Quek and Johnson 2018, 7). However, in recent years, there is also an argument that China's diplomatic policymaking environment has become increasingly pluralistic, and that public sentiment is an important driver in China's coercive diplomacy in the East and South China Seas. In this study, I examine certain domestic factors and their effect on the outcome of the coercive diplomacy. Specifically, domestic factors will be examined in two aspects: first, on the part of China, whether the bureaucratic pluralism or the competition among various maritime agencies affects the ineffectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy; second, on the part of the target, if public opinion manifested in the number, frequency and the degree of violence of South China Sea-related or anti-China demonstrations is present, the study will examine whether and how such a constraint contributes to the intransigence of the small states attempting to counter China's maritime coercive diplomacy.¹⁹ In the case of the Philippines, if it is present, the study will take into account the domestic constraint in the form of the pressure from different powerful and interest groups.

¹⁹ The relationship between China's nationalist public opinion and China's assertive actions in the South China Sea has been examined in detail in Andrew Chubb's dissertation *Chinese Popular Nationalism and PRC Policy in the South China Sea* (University of Western Australia, 2016). Some cases explored in my study have also been investigated in Chubb's dissertation, focusing on the aspect of Chinese public opinion.

Two elements of misperception of the coercer's power and a high degree of ideological conflict with the coercer, on which the factor of the intransigence of the small state is based, do not fall within the scope of this study. In the cases of South China Sea disputes, small states like Vietnam and the Philippines have a clear perception of China's military power. At the same time, as both China and Vietnam are one-party states led by the Communist Parties, there is no ideological conflict between the two countries. This is hardly the element leading to the intransigence of the small state in the case of the Philippines.

Tactical factor of clarity concerning the precise terms of compliance and settlement. Last but not least, it is the tactical factor of the clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement of the crisis, that this the study will examine. As Schelling points out, an opponent will refuse to comply with the coercing power's demand if he fears that it will merely result in renewed pressure and new demands in the future (Schelling 1966, 74–75). With a clarity concerning the precise terms of a settlement, according to George, this condition will favour the success of the coercive diplomacy because it provides the adversary an assurance against the possibility of pushing for greater concession (George and Simons 1994a, 286).

3.2. Research design and sources

The previous section has outlined the analytical framework to examine China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy and raised factors affecting the success and failure of the strategy as well as pathways in which they affect the outcome. The following section will discuss the research design, methods used in the study and sources.

3.2.1. Research method

The study uses a case study approach and employs George's case study method of controlled or focused, structured comparison. The method examines a number of cases and establishes its results by making comparisons among them. The method stipulates that one must structure the analysis by asking the same set of 'standardised, general questions' of each case, and focus selectively on those aspects of each case that are relevant to the research objective (George and Bennett 2004, 67, 69–70; P. V. Jakobsen 1998b, 6). By asking the identical questions of each case, the findings of the cases can be analysed and compared systematically (George and Bennett 2004, 86–87). In other words, with this method the study is able to uncover similarities among cases that suggest possible generalisations; but it is also able to investigate the differences among cases in a systematic manner (George and Smoke 1974, 95–96). Also, with its focused or selective nature, this method helps to highlight some aspects of a historical event or crisis, leaving out other aspects. This method can be used to discover certain patterns of success and failure in coercive diplomacy and to highlight major factors related to coercive success (or failure).

Following George's method of structured, focused comparison, I will approach each case with a set of general and standardised questions to guide case construction:

Policy goals: What are China's objectives and demands?

Therefore, the effect of Chinese public opinion on China's maritime coercive diplomacy will not be discussed in this dissertation.

Tools, threats/inducements: What coercive tactics and tools has China used in maritime coercive diplomacy? How did China employ sea-based forces? How did China influence other target(s)' behaviour and policy? What other measures (political isolation, formal/informal economic sanctions) did China use to put pressure on the target(s)?

Evaluating the coercive diplomacy outcome: What is the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy? To what extent did China succeed or fail? With which demands did the target comply?

Asymmetry of motivation: What are the interests at stake for the target state? How did these interests affect its motivation? Did the coercing state make demands that engage the vital interests of its target(s)? How did this factor affect the target's resistance? Did the coercing state offer a carrot? How did it reduce the adversary's motivation to counter coercion?

The reaction of external actors and regional strategic environment: How did the confrontation impact on the interests of external actors? How did the dominant power react to the coercing power's coercion? How did the dominant power's deterrent signals influence the coercing state's risk calculation and the target's resistance?

Domestic factors: Is there a coordination among the government agencies involved in coercive diplomacy? Did this help China gain policy goals in its coercive diplomacy efforts? Is there any demonstration against the coercing power on the part of the target? How did public opinion affect the decision of the target whether to comply with the coercing power's demands?

Asymmetry of power: Is the asymmetry of power widening? How did it affect the coerced's fear of escalation and increase the coercer's motivation to escalate the crisis?

Tactical factors: Are the terms of compliance and settlement of the crisis clear? How did it affect the reaction of the coerced?

This research follows three steps. The first is to select case studies on the basis of an event data; and then complete the cases by addressing the questions mentioned above for each case; the third step is to analyse and compare the findings of the cases in a systematic way to highlight major factors and how they affect the success and failure of China's maritime coercive diplomacy.

3.2.2. Case selection

I have used three criteria to decide whether an event constitutes a case of coercive diplomacy:

1. Actors of maritime coercive diplomacy activities must be Chinese government agencies. The coercive action must be state behaviour.
2. Chinese activities must involve the display, demonstration, threat and/or use of limited sea-based forces (including naval ships, coast guard and maritime militia vessels, armed fishing vessels, offshore oil rig, and dredgers).
3. The coercive diplomacy attempt must be undertaken to achieve one or a number of policy goals.

The study assembles China's activities in the maritime disputes in the South China Sea from 1970 to 2017, assessing those which met all three criteria. Based on this event data, the study focuses on the period from 2011 onwards, since 2011 is identified as a turning point in China's use of coercive diplomacy to manage its maritime disputes in the South China Sea (analysed in detail in Chapter Four). Eight coercive actions or cases have been selected. They are: the *Binh Minh 02* cable-cutting incident of May 2011, the *Viking II* cable-cutting incident of June 2011, Chinese coercive diplomacy towards the Philippines over Scarborough Shoal in 2012, China's aggressive presence at Second Thomas Shoal in 2013, China's blockage of Philippines vessels at Second Thomas Shoal in 2014, China's deployment of oil rig HYSY 981 within Vietnam's claimed EEZ in 2014, China's Spratly Islands land reclamation from 2013 to 2015, and militarisation in the South China Sea from 2016 to present. However, three pairs of coercive actions – two cuttings of Vietnamese oil survey ships' seismic cables in 2011; the coercive diplomacy against the Philippines over Second Thomas Shoal in 2013 and blockage in 2014; and the Spratly Islands land reclamation and militarisation – are undertaken towards the same target and are aimed at achieving the same coercive objectives. Therefore, they are grouped and examined together in three overarching cases.

There are several reasons why these cases have been chosen. First and foremost, these are major events and crises to which the existing literature often refers as manifestations of China's assertiveness in reinforcing its claims in the South China Sea after 2011. They are typical and represent qualitative changes in China's coercive behaviour since 2011 (discussed in detail in Chapter Four). Second, these cases guarantee to provide a good degree of variation in the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. Each of these events contains different phases characterised by distinct coercive diplomacy exchanges and demands made, while the study evaluates the success and failure of China's coercive diplomacy by assessing which demand was complied with and which objective China failed to achieve. The variation in the outcome not only come from all of these cases, but also from within each case. Hence, this variation helps to avoid the selection bias problem. Third, this selection contains different cases in which China used maritime coercive diplomacy towards the same target and cases in which one coercive strategy was employed to influence different targets' behaviours. This selection, therefore, allows the comparison regarding the effect of factors and the change in the value of these factors on the outcome of China's coercive strategy to be more comprehensive. Also, as mentioned above, that there exist distinct coercive diplomacy exchanges within the same event not only increase the number of sub-cases but has the advantage of holding several variables constant, thus enhancing the reliability of the comparison undertaken. Fourth, the data and information on the developments and activities of all relevant actors in these events and crises are more available and richer in comparison with other cases taking place at the same period, thereby permitting the study to trace factors affecting the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy.

3.2.3. Data and sources

The set of event data recording Chinese maritime coercive diplomacy since 1970 was compiled using Chinese, and Vietnamese media reports, internally circulated materials in Vietnam, archives from Vietnam, remarks and archives of Vietnamese and Chinese Ministries of Foreign Affairs, English-language sources including event data from the CSIS-China Power Project, as well as other sources encountered in the course of the research project. Due to the fact that many actions

have occurred but kept in secret, the data is surely incomplete. The study's approach is to cover incidents reported by international as well as domestic media. To construct the dataset on cases of China's maritime coercion, the study uses LexisNexis and Factiva newspaper searches, as well as the online archives of BBC's Summary of World Broadcasts Far East, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

For each specific event, the study draws on statements made by Chinese leaders, reported by state news agencies or party media, which are the most important and authoritative source of insight. Articles by Chinese international affairs scholars and strategic studies experts provide windows into current thinking and analysis of relevant parts of China's intellectual community (Chubb 2016, 333, 336). The statements, protests of disputes issued in the name of institutions – normally the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and government maritime agencies such as State Oceanic Administration (SOA) – are sources that capture the government's responses to disputes like the South China Sea on a daily or weekly basis. Online archives of Chinese and English transcripts of press briefings and remarks by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson have been largely exploited.

The only channel for authoritative media commentary on international disputes and crises is the *People's Daily*, which speaks in the name of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee. Among reporting, commentary, signed articles, and editorial comments, commentaries (or the 'editorial department article') that speaks for the *People's Daily* are the most authoritative (Godwin and Miller 2013, 30–33). However, semi-authoritative, semi-official documents and reports, comments and policy assessments written by think-tanks, as well as editorials, commentator articles in the *People's Daily*, *China Daily* and the *Liberation Army Daily* are also useful sources for insights into China's policy assessment.

On the Vietnamese and Philippines sides, data for some cases can also be drawn from leaked U.S. State Department cables, and English-, Chinese- and Vietnamese-language press reporting supplemented with archival materials and interviews with officials and knowledgeable observers. Vietnamese and Philippine media reports are extensively used to reconstruct the incidents and trace the reactions of the two countries. Furthermore, documents including confidential cables submitted to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) by the Philippines, which have been made public, were a valuable source.

Chapter 4

China's disputed claims and maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea

This chapter introduces the South China Sea disputes, outlines China's claims and assesses China's use of maritime coercion since 1970. First, the chapter presents a brief overview of the South China Sea and its importance in terms of trade route, resources and security. The second section of the chapter outlines the main characteristics of the maritime disputes in the South China Sea, with a focus on China's claims and its declared policy of management and resolution of the disputes. Next, drawing from an event dataset of China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea from 1970 to 2017, the chapter notes a shift in China's use of maritime coercion to manage maritime disputes in 2011. The reasons for selecting representative cases of incidents and crises are presented in the final section.

4.1. Brief overview of the South China Sea

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea that covers a total area of approximately 3.5 million square kilometres (Jones 2016, 76). It is surrounded by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The South China Sea is of importance in terms of trade routes, energy, economic and national security for coastal countries in the region. More than a quarter of global trade passes through the South China Sea. According to the CSIS China Power Project, an estimated 3.4 trillion USD in trade passed through the South China Sea in 2016 (CSIS 2017). China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea are all dependent on the sea lanes for their trade, including the import of oil and gas (Thayer 2017b). For China alone, over 60 percent of its maritime trade transited the South China Sea in 2016 (CSIS 2017). It is also widely believed that the South China Sea contains large oil and gas reserves. In 2013, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimated there to be around 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 billion cubic metres of natural gas under the South China Sea, while Chinese estimates range from 28 to 213 billion barrels of oil (Thayer 2017b; EIA 2013). Furthermore, the South China Sea is important for regional food security and employment, as it provides approximately 10 percent of global fishing output (Cook 2012, 48–49; Thayer 2017b). In addition, the South China Sea is also significant for surrounding countries' national defence. The Chinese themselves describe the area as "an important exit for our country's maritime forces to break through enemy blockades during wartime", adding that effective control of it would "greatly increase [China's] comprehensive strategic deterrent ability" (HCSCSS 2003, 2; Chubb 2016, 48–49).

4.2. China's claims and declared policy

Maritime disputes in the South China Sea between China and a number of other Southeast Asian coastal countries involve two aspects: territorial sovereignty over maritime features and maritime jurisdiction.

With respect to sovereignty over maritime features, the PRC lays claim to territorial sovereignty over all four groups of islands and underwater features in the South China Sea, which are referred to by the PRC as Dongsha Qundao, Nansha Qundao, Xisha Qundao and Zhongsha Qundao. Dongsha Qundao is known internationally as the Pratas Islands, Nansha Qundao as the Spratly Islands, and Xisha Qundao as the Paracel Islands. According to the PRC, Zhongsha Qundao includes Scarborough Shoal and Macclesfield Bank.²⁰ The PRC's claim of "indisputable sovereignty" over all four island groups is based on the premise that China was the first country to discover, name, explore and exploit the resources of the South China Sea Islands and was the first to continuously and effectively exercise sovereignty and jurisdiction over them (FMPRC 2014x; 2016b). Regarding the current situation of control,²¹ China has controlled the entire Paracels since 1974, over which Vietnam still maintains its claim to sovereignty. In 2012, China gained de facto control over Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines. In the Spratly Islands (see map in Appendix A), which are claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, China occupies only seven reefs: Johnson South, Hughes, Cuarteron, Gaven, Fiery Cross, Subi and Mischief Reef (Vuving 2016),²² whilst Vietnam currently occupies 21 features and the Philippines holds nine. Taiwan occupies only one but the largest natural land feature – Itu Aba Island (known as Taiping in Chinese), while Malaysia has troops and facilities present in five features. Brunei claims only one feature – Louisa Reef – but has not erected any buildings or military installations there. In 2014, the PRC's Position Paper on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Philippines reiterated that China has always enjoyed sovereignty over the Spratly Islands in its entirety, not just over some features thereof (FMPRC 2014x). Thus, in the PRC's official view, the occupation of maritime features by other claimants in the Spratly Islands is illegal (ISDP 2016).

A second category of maritime disputes between China and other Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea involves the delimitation of jurisdictional boundaries of EEZs and continental shelves. The 1982 United Nations Conventional on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) specifies up to four main sovereign territorial or jurisdictional zones to which coastal states are entitled. A coastal state is entitled to "territorial seas" within a 12-nautical-mile zone extending out from its coastline, over which the state has complete sovereignty. The contiguous zone, in which a state can take measures to prevent and punish the infringement of laws within its territorial seas, extends another 12 nautical miles from the outer edge of the territorial seas. A coastal state can also claim an EEZ extending 200 nautical miles from their coastline. The UNCLOS gives coastal states the right to regulate economic activities including fishing and oil exploration within their EEZs (O'Rourke 2014, 3–4). In some instance, the UNCLOS also allows coastal states to claim the continental shelf up to 350 nautical miles from the baseline, where coastal states are afforded exclusive authority to regulate the exploration and exploitation of the resources of the seabed (UN 1982, 53–54; Burgess et al. 2017, 13; Dutton 2011, 49; Dao 2016). The UNCLOS also defines three maritime features and the different maritime zones that they can generate. If a maritime feature is always above water and capable of sustaining human habitation or economic activity of

²⁰ According to a common view in China, the Scarborough Reef is considered to be part of the Macclesfield Bank, see: (Zou 1999b, 28).

²¹ The Pratas Islands are under the control of Taiwan.

²² Johnson South Reef (Chinese: Chigua Jiao), Hughes Reef (Chinese: Dongmen Jiao), Cuarteron Reef (Chinese: Huayang Jiao), Gaven Reef (Chinese: Nanxun Jiao), Fiery Cross Reef (Chinese: Yongshu Jiao), Subi Reef (Chinese: Zhubi Jiao), and Mischief Reef (Chinese: Meiji Jiao).

its own, it qualifies as an island and can generate a territorial sea, a contiguous zone, and an EEZ. If a maritime feature is always above water but unable to support human habitation or economic life, it is classified as a rock and is not entitled to an EEZ. Low-tide elevations, which are only above water at low tide, generate nothing (see summary in Table 1).

China complicates these disputes through its ambiguous claims of authority over the water space in the South China Sea illustrated on the so-called map of the 'nine-dash' line (see Figure 1), which is also known as the 'U-shaped' or the 'cow tongue' line (Dutton 2011, 49). The nine-dash line encloses an area covering roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea (O'Rourke 2014, 10). The area inside the nine-dash line significantly overlaps with EEZs asserted by Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and by Indonesia.²³

The line first appeared as an eleven-dash line in official maps of the Republic of China in 1947 (USCC 2012, 220). The PRC has succeeded to the 1947 map and then removed two segments in the Gulf of Tonkin.²⁴ The nine dashes in the South China Sea remain on maps published both in China and on Taiwan (Dutton 2011, 44–45). In May 2009, the PRC included a map with the nine-dash line in an official international document for the first time – a *Note Verbale* sent to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) (T. T. Tran 2012, 1).

²³ Although Indonesia's claimed EEZ extends into the South China Sea, the Indonesian government does not currently recognise China's nine-dash line (which overlaps with their EEZ) and so does not consider itself a claimant in any South China Sea-related maritime dispute (US DOD 2015b, 7).

²⁴ According to Zheng Wang (2015, 506), Li JinMing and Li Dexia (2003, 290), the PRC dropped two dashes in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1953 with Premier Zhou Enlai's approval, while Zou Keyuan (1999b, 34–35) referred the date later to 1960s. Beijing did not publicly explain why the two segments were removed from the map. However, Zou Keyuan (1999b, 34–35) suggests that it might have been related to the transfer of the sovereignty over the Bach Long Vi island (known in Chinese as Bai Long Wei) in the Gulf of Tonkin from China to Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin was eventually delimited between China and Vietnam in 2000, when the two sides reached an agreement on the Delimitation of the Territorial Seas, EEZs and Continental Shelves in the Gulf of Tonkin. For more, see: (Zou 1999b, 34–35; Zheng 2015, 506; Jinming Li and Li 2003, 290; BOIESA 2014, 3)

Table 1: **Maritime zones and maritime features under the 1982 UNCLOS**²⁵

Maritime zones	Geographical scope	Rights under UNCLOS
Territorial sea	Extends 12 nautical miles from the coastal state's baseline (fixed to begin at the low-water line along the coast)	Coastal states have complete sovereignty over territorial seas. The sovereignty extends to the airspace over and seabed below the territorial sea. However, under UNCLOS, all ships of all states, including both civilian and military vessels, enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea of other states.
Contiguous zone	Begins where the territorial sea ends and extends another 12 nautical miles, ending 24 nautical miles from the baseline	The contiguous zone is not the sovereign territory of a state. A state has the right to both prevent and punish infringement of fiscal, immigration, sanitary, and customs laws within its territory and territorial sea. However, as the contiguous zone is considered part of international waters, states do not have the right to limit navigation in this maritime zone.
EEZ	Extends 200 nautical miles from the baseline	The state has the exclusive right to exploit or conserve any living resources and non-living resources found within the water, on the sea floor, or under the sea floor's subsoil. In other words, states can exercise jurisdiction to explore and exploit resources within the EEZ but not full sovereignty. The U.S. and other countries argue that UNCLOS does not give coastal states the right to regulate foreign military activities in the parts of their EEZs, while China argues that UNCLOS gives coastal states the right to regulate not only economic activities, but also foreign military activities, in their EEZs.
Continental shelf	Extends 350 nautical miles from the baseline	The coastal state exercises sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and

²⁵ For more details see: (UN 1982; Burgess et al. 2017; Freund 2017; Dutton 2011; O'Rourke 2014)

		exploiting natural resources. The rights are exclusive in the sense that if the coastal state does not explore the continental shelf or exploit its natural resources, no one may undertake these activities without the express consent of the coastal state.
Maritime features	Definition	Maritime zones generated
Island	A naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is always above water and capable of sustaining human habitation or economic activity	Islands generate a territorial sea, a contiguous zone, and an EEZ
Rock	A naturally formed area of land surrounded by water, which is always above water, but unlike an island it is not capable of sustaining human habitation or economic activity	Rocks generate a territorial sea, a contiguous zone, but no EEZ
Low-tide elevation	Above water at low tide, but submerged at high tide	Low-tide elevations generate nothing. If they are within 12 nautical miles of land or an island, they can be used as starting points from which the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, and the EEZ can be measured.

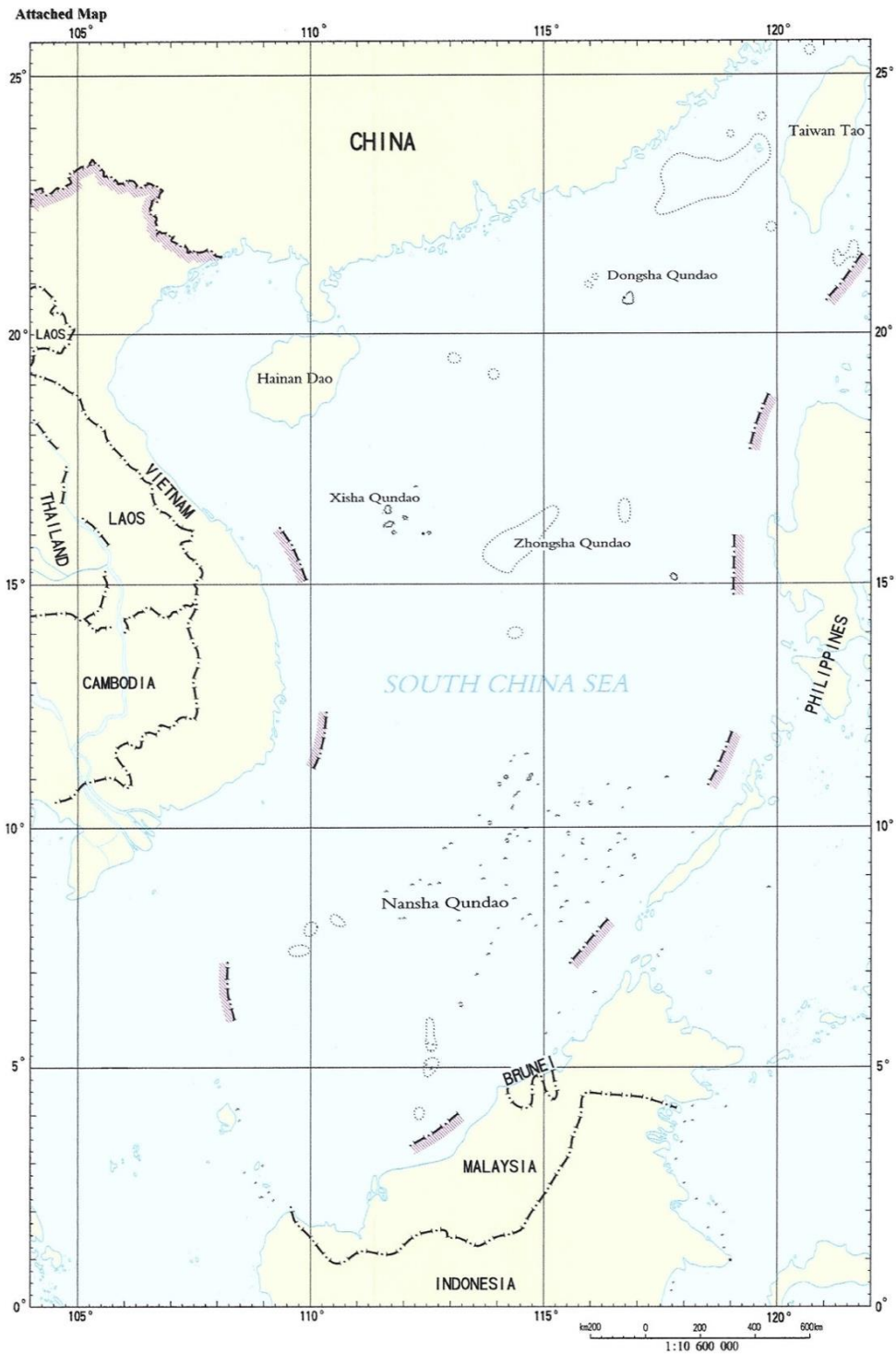


Figure 1: Map of the nine-dash line (submitted to the UN by the PRC)

Source: Communication from China to the UN dated 7 May 2009, available at http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_vnm_37_2009.htm (accessed on 21 September 2015)

Despite attaching this map, the Chinese government has never clarified the meaning of the line (Zheng 2015, 506). Among Chinese scholars, there are various interpretations. Under the "minimalist" interpretation, the nine-dash line is to assert a claim to sovereignty over all the islands, rocks, sandbars, and other land features in the South China Sea (Zou 1999b, 52; 2009, 178; Z. Gao 1994, 346). However, according to Zheng Wang (2015, 512), this interpretation is no longer the commonly accepted point of view. Some Chinese academics have advanced the interpretation of the nine-dash line as China's historic claim (*Huanqiu* 2012b; J. Guan 2012, 15; Zheng 2015, 513). Under the historic claim interpretation, there are two viewpoints. For some Chinese scholars, the line indicates China's claimed "historic waters", over which China has sovereignty like over internal waters or territorial seas, while for others, the nine-dash line marks the water areas over which China is entitled to some lesser set of historic rights, such as fishing rights and traditional jurisdictional rights. Recently, according to Wu Shicun, President of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, the nine-dash line is based on the theory of "sovereignty + UNCLOS + historic rights". Accordingly, China enjoys sovereignty over all the features within the nine-dash line, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction, defined by the UNCLOS, for instance, EEZ and continental shelf when certain features fulfill the legal definition of Island Regime under Article 121 of the UNCLOS. In addition to that, China enjoys certain historic rights within this nine-dash line, including fishing rights, navigation rights and priority rights of resource development (ORF 2013, 9; Zou and Liu 2015, 63; 2016, 132).

In addition to the nine-dash line, China's claims to maritime zones from maritime features in the South China Sea add problems to disputes over jurisdiction in the South China Sea. In 1996, China issued the Declaration of the Government of the PRC on the Baselines of the Territorial Sea of the PRC to establish straight baselines around the Paracel Islands, which under the UNCLOS are only applied to 'archipelagic states'. In 1998, the PRC enacted the Law on the EEZ and the Continental Shelf and claims an EEZ from the Paracel Islands. However, it has not clarified the outer limits of its EEZ claim (Beckman and Schofield 2014, 203). This EEZ would overlap with Vietnam's EEZ claims from its coast and to an extended continental shelf (Beckman and Schofield 2014, 222). In a *Note Verbale* submitted to the CLCS in April 2011, China stated that "[u]nder the relevant provisions of the 1982 UNCLOS, as well as the Law of the PRC on Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zones (1992) and the Law on Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf of the PRC (1998), China's Nansha Islands is [sic] fully entitled to Territorial Sea, EEZ and Continental Shelf" (PRC UNPM 2011). Nevertheless, China has not indicated the baselines from which its maritime zones are measured or the outer limit of its EEZ or continental shelf claim from the Spratlys (Beckman and Schofield 2014, 203). Nor has China clarified which features in the Spratlys it considers to be "islands" and which it considers "rocks". Assuming for the sake of argument that China has sovereignty over all the disputed islands in the South China Sea, maritime zones generated by South China Sea islands would overlap with those generated by the coastlines of Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei (BOIESA 2014, 13–14).

In January 2013, the Philippines filed a case at the PCA and challenged China's claims in the South China Sea (Moynihan 2017, 3). On 12 July 2016, the arbitral Tribunal in the Hague issued its ruling, concluding that there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the nine-dash line (PCA 2016b, 2). With regard to the status of features in the South China Sea, the Tribunal determined that none of the largest features

in the Spratly Islands region could qualify as an island entitled to an EEZ (PCA 2016b, 2; Batongbacal 2017, 40), and that the continental shelf and the Spratly Islands cannot generate maritime zones collectively as a unit. China, however, issued a white paper in which it asserted that its "territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea shall under no circumstances be affected by those awards" and that "China does not accept or recognise those awards" (PRC SC 2016; Xinhua 2016b).

Rather, with regard to dispute management and settlement, the PRC states that it prefers to resolve the maritime disputes with individual claimant states on a bilateral level rather than through arbitration provided by the UN or other forms of what it sees as "imposed" dispute settlement (FMPRC 2016a; ISDP 2016). In terms of the international community, in general, the PRC opposes attempts to internationalise the South China Sea issue. An FMPRC spokesperson once stated "[w]e firmly oppose any country which has no connection to the South China Sea getting involved in the dispute, and we oppose the internationalisation, multilateralisation or expansion of the issue. It cannot solve the problem, but make [sic] it more complicated" (Xinhua 2010; Blanchard and Yan 2010).²⁶

Instead, China has suggested a formula of "setting aside dispute and pursuing joint development", which China deems as a new approach for settlement of territorial disputes. In 1993, Chinese Premier Li Peng proposed "shelving disputes in favour of joint development" in the Spratly Islands.²⁷ According to the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the concept of "setting aside dispute and pursuing joint development" has four elements. Firstly, the sovereignty of the territories concerned belongs to China; secondly, when conditions are not ripe to bring about a solution to territorial dispute, discussion on the issue of sovereignty may be postponed so that the dispute is set aside. To set aside dispute does not mean giving up sovereignty; thirdly, the territories under dispute may be developed jointly; and finally, the purpose of joint development is to enhance mutual understanding and create conditions for the eventual resolution of territorial ownership (FMPRC 2014a). In this regard, the concept first and foremost promises that the sovereignty of the disputed islands belongs to China. It is also read by other claimants that the concept creates conditions where they accept Chinese sovereignty over the disputed islands through the implementation of joint development (Iida 2008, 7). In practice, during the 2000s, China has adopted some accommodation to manage the disputes in the South China Sea. In December 2000, China and Vietnam signed both the Agreement on the Delimitation of the Territorial Seas, EEZs and Continental Shelves in the Gulf of Tonkin and the Agreement on Fishery Cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin, which came into force in 2004.²⁸ In 2002, after three years of negotiation, China and ASEAN member states agreed the DOC. In 2004, China concluded a three-year Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) with the Philippines to conduct a joint seismic survey in the Spratly

²⁶ This statement was made by the PRC Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu at a regular news briefing on 21 September 2010, on the eve of the ASEAN-U.S. Summit taking place in New York.

²⁷ This approach is based on Deng Xiaoping's 1980s guideline of "sovereignty is ours, set aside disputes, pursue joint development". Annual Work of the Chinese Government by Premier Li Peng, to the First Plenary Session of the Eighth National People's Congress" (13 March 1993), reprinted in *People's Daily* (2 April 1993), 3; (FMPRC 2014a).

²⁸ For more on both the Agreement on the Delimitation of the Territorial Sea, EEZ and Continental Shelf in the Gulf of Tonkin and the Agreement on Fishery Cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin between Vietnam and China, see: (H. T. Nguyen 2005; Zou 2005; Huang and Huang 2013)

Islands, which Vietnam joined in 2005. However, China "has never demonstrated a willingness to put aside its territorial claims" (Storey 2012, 56). The following section highlights the continuity and consistency of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy to uphold its claims in the South China Sea.

4.3. China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea

As stated in Chapter Three, in this study maritime coercive diplomacy refers to an attempt or series of attempts to influence the target(s)' behaviour(s) or policy(ies) through the display, demonstration, threat or use of limited sea-based forces. Maritime coercive diplomacy must involve physical actions undertaken by the state. Accordingly, maritime coercion can include: the use of limited force to attack or occupy disputed territories or land features, military exercises in disputed areas, the deployment of law enforcement forces to enforce blockades, harassment, detention of foreign fishing boats or personnel, the use of oil rigs or oil platforms to undertake exploration or exploitation of resources in the disputed areas or areas claimed by other claimants, and building military outposts.

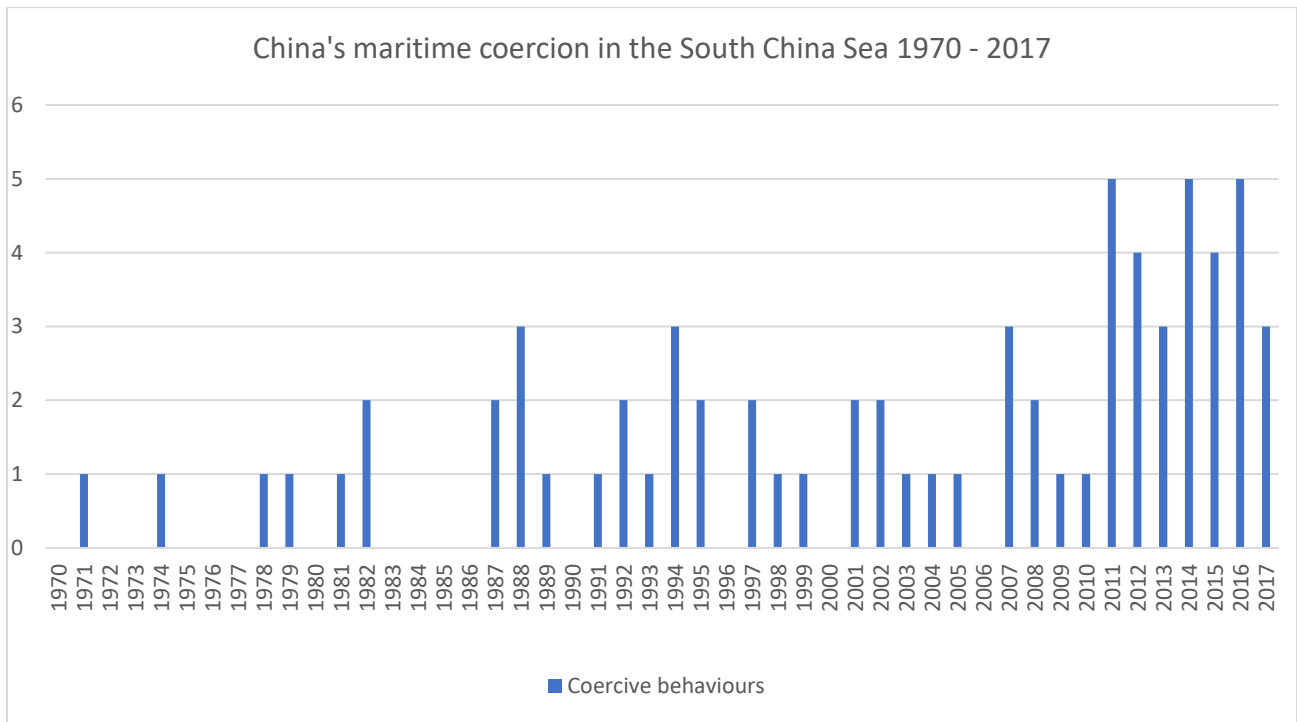


Figure 2: **Yearly number of China's coercive actions in the South China Sea from 1970 to 2017**

Source: Compiled by author from Vietnam News Agency, VNMOFA (www.mofa.gov.vn), CSIS China Power (<https://chinapower.csis.org/maritime-forces-destabilizing-asia/>), Reuters (www.reuters.com), BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (www.lexis-nexis.com), Far Eastern Economic Review (www.proquest.com), other sources (for details see Appendix B)

From English-, Vietnamese- and Chinese-language materials and sources, the study produces a dataset on the PRC's coercive actions towards other Southeast Asian claimants in the South China Sea across time from 1970 to 2017 (all coercive actions are listed in detail in Appendix B). Figure 2 shows the yearly number of Chinese coercive actions in the South China Sea since 1970. It is worth noting that China also exercises coercive diplomacy and gets involved in incidents of harassing the U.S. naval ships in the South China Sea. However, the event data in this study does not count these incidents. Instead, the event data focuses only on China's coercive actions against Southeast Asian countries, that have maritime territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea.

The event data demonstrates three significant trends. First, there is continuity in the use of coercive diplomacy by China in the South China Sea. While the number of cases in which China applied maritime coercion has varied over time, coercion has been a strategy consistently exercised by China to manage maritime disputes and assert its claims in the South China Sea. Second, prior to 2011, three periods experienced a notable increase in the number of Chinese coercive behaviours: 1987–1989, 1992–1995, 2007–2008. Third, a major shift in China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy occurred in 2011 with a remarkable increase in number, which is highest since 1970. This trend has been more sustained than in past periods. These main observations will be detailed in the following section.

4.3.1. China's maritime coercive diplomacy before 2011

Since the early 1970s, the maritime issues became salient for China. According to Figure 3, the 1974–1976 period witnessed a rapid increase in the number of *People's Daily* articles containing references to the Paracels, and/or Spratly Islands. 1974 was not particularly conspicuous in terms of the number of coercive behaviours that China used in the South China Sea. However, the nature of Chinese coercion undertaken in 1974 is worth noting, since this was the first time that China resorted to military force in the South China Sea. On 19–20 January 1974, Beijing directed a PLAN fleet made up of four Hainan class fast attack craft, two mine sweepers and two fishing boats to launch an attack against South Vietnam and capture the Crescent group of the Paracel Islands.²⁹ Following the January 1974 clash, China consolidated its authority over the entire Paracels and stepped up construction there, ranging from harbours, wharfs, gun emplacements and storage facilities (Garver 1992, 1005).

²⁹ For more on the 1974 Paracels sea battle, see: (Yoshihara 2016; Garver 1992, 1001–5; CIA 2974; Fravel 2008, 277–87)

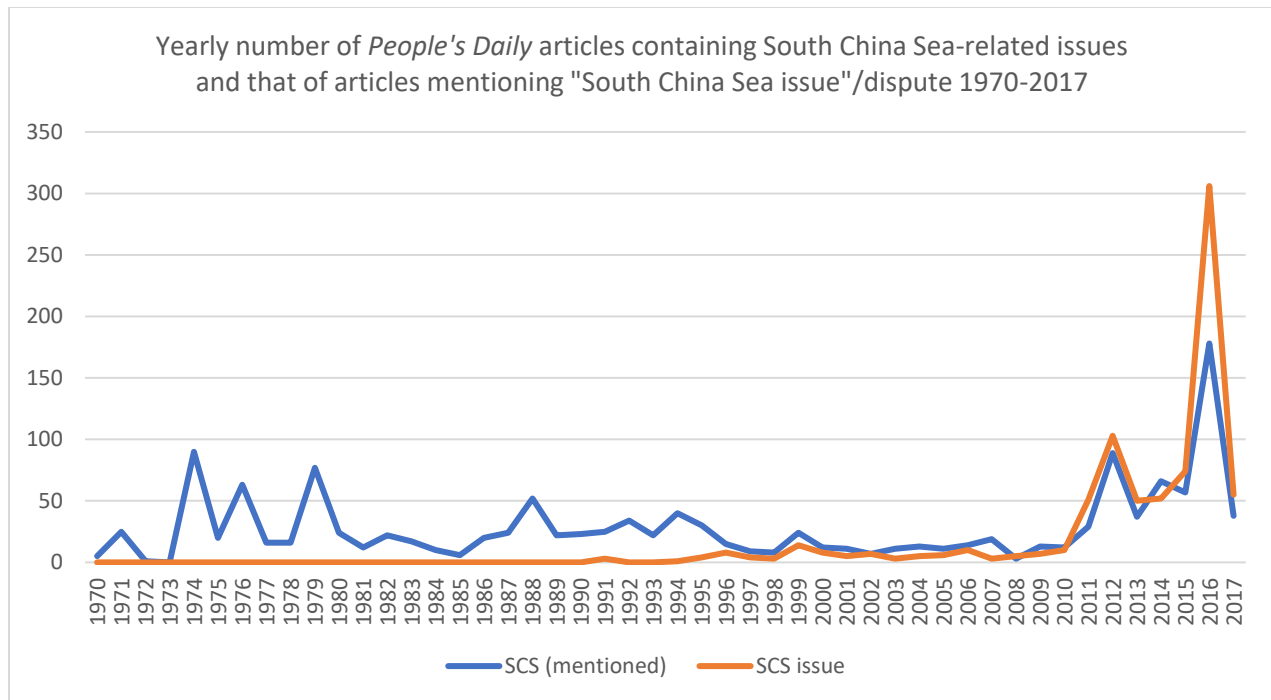


Figure 3: Yearly number of *People's Daily* articles containing South China Sea-related issues and yearly number of articles mentioning "South China Sea issue" in *People's Daily* from 1970 to 2017

Source: *People's Daily* Data (Renmin Shuju), available at <http://data.people.com.cn/rmrb/20180502/1?code=2> (accessed on 1 May 2018)

Search form: Key words for the frequency of South China Sea references: "nanhai zhudao" (南海诸岛) (South China Sea Islands), "nansha qundao" (南沙群岛) (Spratly Islands), "xisha qundao" (西沙群岛) (Paracel Islands); Key words used to search for maritime disputes in South China Sea: "nanhai wenti" (南海问题) (South China Sea issue)

China's heightened level of attention on the South China Sea in the second half of the 1980s is shown by the increase in the number of *People's Daily* articles mentioning groups of islands in the South China Sea. The number of articles rose from 20 in 1986 to 52 in 1988 (see Figure 3). Regarding specific maritime coercive behaviours, the PLAN's South Sea Fleet – an arm of the PLAN focused on China's Southeastern coast and the South China Sea – conducted their first combat patrol in the South China Sea in May–June 1987, the goals of which were to "exercise our sovereignty, display our maritime power and integrate war preparedness" (Xu 1999, 309; H. Liu 2004, 494; Fravel 2008, 293). Between mid-October and late November 1987, Beijing again conducted a series of military manoeuvres in the southern part of the South China Sea, which were intended to improve the Chinese Navy's capacity to carry out medium- and long-distance operations and demonstrate the possibility of China's participation in combat activities deep into the South China Sea (Zhongguo Xinwen She 1987; VNA 1987; Xinhua 1988; Chang 1990, 24). Notably, for 1988, three Chinese coercive behaviours are identified. On 13–14 March 1988, the PRC employed military force against Vietnam, establishing its first foothold in the Spratly Islands. The armed clash that took place at Johnson Reef resulted in the sinking of at least one Vietnamese ship and the death of an estimated 70 sailors. Following this naval skirmish, China consolidated

its position by occupying another two reefs, bringing the total number of islets China had occupied since January 1988 to six.³⁰ Later that year, the Guangzhou Military Region conducted a major naval exercise called *Guangzi-15* in the Spratlys to test the PLA's ability in coastal defence and protection of territory claimed by China in the South China Sea (Godwin 1997, 204–5; Dinmore 1988). The construction works and the installation of instruments and equipment followed the occupation of these reefs. In late July 1988, China's permanent base on Fiery Cross Reef was completed, thereby significantly boosting its military capabilities in the Spratlys (Garver 1992, 1011–12; Chang 1990, 27). The construction of harbours and the enlargement of air base also began on a number of islands in the Paracels in 1989 (*Nasha.Org.Cn* 2005; Garver 1992, 1014).

China resumed its advances into the South China Sea in 1992. In early July, Vietnam condemned China for upgrading its Spratly outposts. According to Vietnam, China sent naval landing ships and other boats to Gaven Reef to erect a stone tablet indicating sovereignty and to transport materials onto the reef (Ta Kung Pao 1992; *Nasha.Org.Cn* 2005). Tensions between China and Vietnam increased in August 1992, when China deployed two oil drilling ships to drill an oil well in an area in the Gulf of Tonkin, where Beijing had earlier agreed to temporarily suspend oil exploration before the sea boundary between the two countries was delineated (VOV 1992; VNA 1992; Thayer 2002, 273–74). Hanoi even hinted that they would use force to repel the two Chinese vessels (Thayer 2002, 273–74). In May 1993, Chinese oil exploration ships reportedly intruded again into Vietnam's southern continental shelf and interfered with oil exploration vessels working for BP and India's Oil & Gas Commission under a contract with Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam or PVN) (FEER 1993, 14). The next year marked a peak in China's use of maritime coercion in the South China Sea since 1988. In the first half of 1994, tensions over the issue of oil concessions heightened between China and Vietnam in Vanguard Bank (Wan'an in Chinese; Bai Tu Chinh in Vietnamese), when a U.S.-based company, Crestone Energy Corporation, which was awarded an oil exploration concession by Beijing in 1992, began seismic surveys in the area. While Vietnam claimed that this area was located within its EEZ and continental shelf, and launched official protests, China increased its naval presence by dispatching a number of naval vessels to the area. In July 1994, it was reported that two Chinese warships were deployed to blockade the oil prospecting facilities built by Vietnam. Chinese ships drove back at least one Vietnamese ship carrying supplies to the prospecting facilities (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* 1994; *BBC* 1994; Amer 2002, 11; D. Tran 2002, 210–11). Late 1994 and early 1995 marked a turning point in China's maritime disputes in the South China Sea with the Philippines, when China occupied the Filipino-claimed Mischief Reef (Meiji Jiao in Chinese, Panganiban in Filipino) in the Spratly Islands, which lay well within the Philippines' claimed EEZ. It was remarkable because China no longer restrained the employment of maritime coercion only towards Vietnam, but it used coercion towards another Southeast Asian country – the Philippines for the first time. After occupying the reef, China ordered the construction of military bunkers and sent nine warships to the area for many days in February 1995 (A. C. Guan 2000, 206; Storey 1999, 97; VOV 1995). On 13 May 1995, a Chinese fishery administrative ship blocked a Filipino naval frigate and patrol boat at the entrance to Mischief Reef, leading to a stand-off, which ended with the withdrawal of the Philippine ships and China's success in taking control of the reef (N. Ghosh 1995b; 1995a).

³⁰ The six reefs China seized in the Spratly Islands from January to the end of March 1988 were: Fiery Cross Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Gaven Reef, Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef and Subi Reef. For more details, see: (Do 2016b, 51; Chang 1990, 27).

China's use of coercion decreased during the late 1990s and most of the 2000s until 2007, when China Marine Surveillance (CMS) forces started engaging in offensive naval manoeuvres within disputed waters (Bentley 2014). In late June 2007, Vietnam sent vessels to prevent a China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) ship from conducting a seismic survey in an area approximately 47 nautical miles west of Triton Island – the Paracels' closest land feature to the Vietnamese coast. The SOA sent CMS ships to the area to escort the survey ship and later ordered them to intentionally ram the Vietnamese ships (CCTV4 2013; Bentley 2014).³¹ According to the Chinese source, Chinese CMS ships "finally succeed in evicting all Vietnamese vessels from the cordon" (CCTV4 2013). Also, in July 2007, according to Vietnamese sources, one warship was dispatched by the Chinese navy to the southern part of the sea to compel Vietnam to stop its hydrographic campaign for gathering the data to determine the extension of its continental shelf (T. T. Tran 2011, 185). The interference of Chinese vessels in Vietnam's survey operations was repeated in September 2008, when "PLAN vessels [...] harassed Russian and Norwegian vessels contracted by the government of Vietnam [to explore the continental shelf]" (US DOS 2009).³² However, neither China nor Vietnam made official comments about this incident (Chubb 2016, 168). According to Tran Truong Thuy (2011, 195), a Vietnamese diplomat and researcher on South China Sea issues, tensions over resources in the continental shelf from 2007 to 2009 related to the deadline 13 May 2009, which was set by a subsequent agreement of the State Parties to the UNCLOS for states to lodge claims extending their continental shelves beyond 200 nautical mile limit to the UN CLCS. The years 2007 and 2008 also witnessed an intensification of Chinese expulsions, confiscation of catches and the damaging of Vietnamese fishermen's boats near the Paracel Islands (Thayer 2008, 20; T. T. Tran 2011a, 184).

4.3.2. 2011 shift in China's maritime coercive diplomacy

From 2010–2011, China's assertiveness in general has been frequently reported by the international media (as shown in Figure 4). According to Fangyin Zhou, Director of the department of China's Regional Strategy in the National Institute of International Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China's attitude towards the South China Sea disputes began to shift in 2011 (F. Zhou 2016, 875; Hayton 2018a, 43). The event data accords with this view. Figure 2 shows a dramatic rise in the number of coercive behaviours in 2011. Our event data identifies five cases in 2011, which represents the highest level since 1970 (in Figure 2 and detailed in Appendix B). This high frequency of coercive behaviours has been largely sustained in subsequent years. An average of approximately four cases per year between 2011 and 2017 is significantly higher than the 1988, 1994 and 2007 peaks. Therefore, it can be stated that, since 2011, China has been relying more on maritime coercive diplomacy to assert her claims in the South China Sea.

³¹ The eighth part of an eight-episode CCTV4 documentary "Nanhai Jixing" (South China Sea travel journal) provides detailed coverage of this incident, which can be accessed at <http://news.cntv.cn/special/nhix/> (part 8).

³² The incident was mentioned by one Vietnamese diplomat at the Vietnamese Embassy in Beijing in a leaked cable from the American Embassy in Beijing. The cable can be assessed at: <https://archive.org/details/09BEIJING579>.

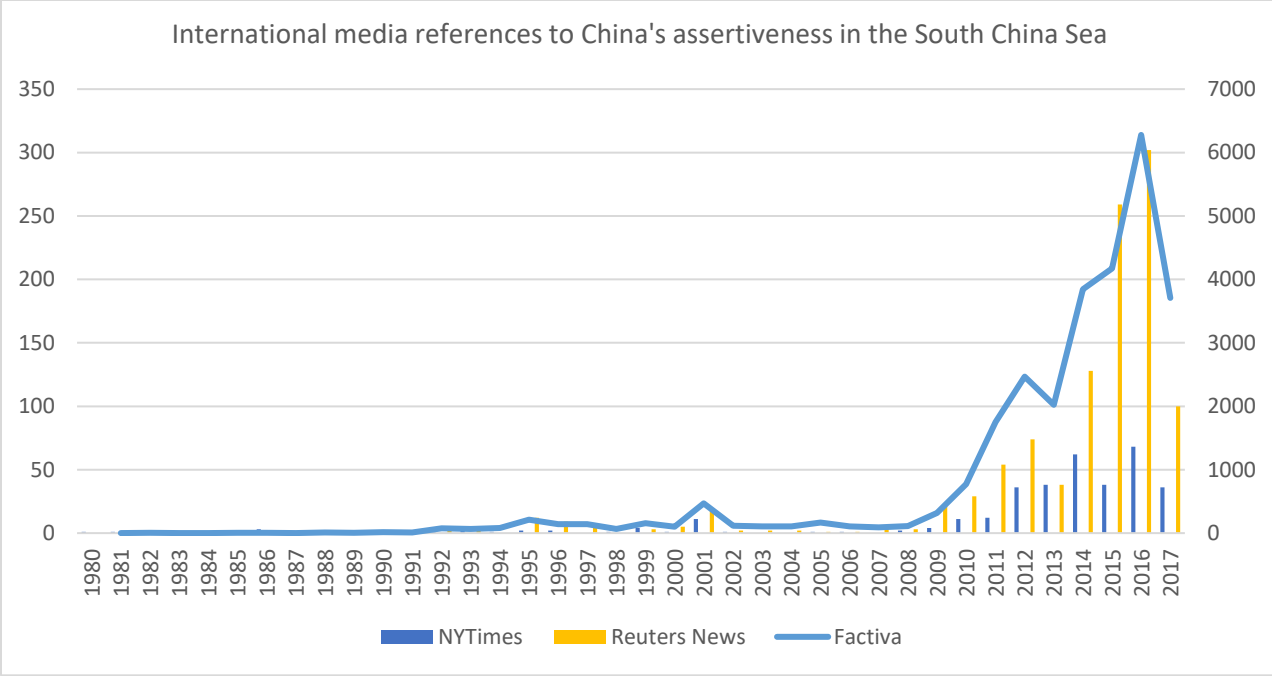


Figure 4: International media references to China's assertiveness/coercion in the South China Sea from 1980 to 2017 (by numbers of articles)

Source: Factiva, available at <https://global.factiva.com>, (accessed on 5 May 2018)

Search form: China, [assertive, aggressive, coercive] (at least one of these words), [South China Sea] (the exact phrase)

More importantly, the period from 2011 has witnessed coercive actions which are qualitatively unprecedented. Since 2011, the number of harassment incidents towards fishing, research and exploration vessels from Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia in the South China Sea has rapidly increased. Among these, two incidents of cutting the cables of Vietnamese seismic survey ships undertaken by China's law enforcement ships are notable due to the fact that no similar incident had happened in that location before. Amidst tensions with Vietnam, China held the first joint armed exercises in June 2011, with the participation of both the PLAN and law enforcement forces (CCTV 2011a; R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768). In 2012, the number of exercises announced increased to an average of 5–6 per year, before dramatically rising to at least 12 in 2013 (Chubb 2016, 343). Two years 2012 and 2013 saw Chinese coercion towards the Philippines for the first time since mid-1995, by taking control over the Philippines-claimed Scarborough Shoal and increasing their physical presence at Second Thomas Shoal. Since 2014, China's policy has been characterised by what Feng Zhang (2016, 103) called "proactive adjustment", in which China actively creates initiatives in the South China Sea. This approach was manifested by three initiatives in 2014. In March, Chinese vessels interfered in the Philippines' routine resupply to its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal for the first time in 15 years. From May to July, China deployed its first indigenous deep-water drilling oil rig HYSY 981 within Vietnam's claimed EEZ, which provoked the worst crisis between the two countries since 1979. Lastly, through 2014 and 2015, China carried out massive land reclamation work in the seven Chinese-occupied reefs in the Spratlys. Although construction and military build-up activities in disputed

areas have been ongoing since the mid-1970s, these island construction projects have been unprecedented in terms of their pace and scope. Since 2016, China has accelerated the building and deployment of a network of airbases, high-frequency radar, missile defence systems and other equipment that could be used for military purposes in the Paracels and Spratlys.

4.4. China's maritime coercive diplomacy since 2011: representative cases

Since 2011, China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea has not only increased in number but have had qualitative changes. Of the 29 coercive behaviours identified between 2011 and 2017, 12 are related to China's harassment of Vietnamese, Filipino, and Malaysian fishing boats. The study sets aside these incidents. The study focuses on "extreme cases" or crises instead of a lesser coercion of the harassing of fishing vessels from other countries by Chinese law enforcements ships. Although China has greatly increased the use of a variety of coercive measures, such as ramming, firing water cannons and using firearms since 2011, these behaviours were already being recorded in the mid-2000s, such that they are not unprecedented. For this same reason, the construction activities in disputed reefs by China in 2011 are not be analysed in the study.

Six cases are good candidates for examining China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy. These are: China's harassment of Malaysian exploration ships in August 2012; the increase in military exercises conducted in the South China Sea between 2012 and 2013; the harassment of a Vietnamese supply ship near Subi Reef by four Chinese vessels in November 2015; the stand-off between five Chinese vessels and a Filipino naval supply ship near Half Moon Shoal in the Spratly Islands in February 2016; China's re-deployment of the oil rig HYSY 981 in disputed areas between China and Vietnam in 2016, and China's threat to attack Vietnamese outposts in the Spratlys unless the Vietnamese government halted its planned oil drilling activities in July 2017. However, either these incidents took place in a very short period or the materials are not rich enough. The study would not be unable to fully evaluate the outcome and identify situational and tactical factors affecting the outcome, such that they are not examined. For militarisation activities in the Paracel and Spratly Islands in 2017, they are not be analysed in detail. However, some militarisation activities since 2016 are covered in the case of land reclamation and militarisation.

The study, therefore, investigates eight coercive actions of China. They are: the *Binh Minh 02 and Viking II* cable cutting incidents of May and June 2011; the 2012 Scarborough stand-off; China's aggressive presence at Second Thomas Shoal in 2013 and blockages at the Shoal in 2014; China's deployment of HYSY 981 oil rig in 2014; and large-scale land reclamation from 2013 to 2015 and militarisation activities in seven reefs in the Spratly Islands since 2016. As mentioned in the previous section, these cases are significant because they represent changes in the quality of China's employment of coercion to manage its maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The existing literature often refers to these incidents as manifestations of China's assertiveness in reinforcing its claims in the South China Sea since 2011. Moreover, the materials on China's objectives and demands and the target states' reactions are available to fully assess the outcome through evaluating which demand China got the target to comply and which objective China failed to achieve.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the South China Sea and presents in detail China's claims to maritime features and jurisdiction in the South China Sea, as well as China's declared policy of managing and resolving maritime disputes with other Southeast Asian claimants. The chapter also presents an overview of China's use of maritime coercion from 1970 to 2017. The event data indicates three periods – 1987–1989, 1992–1995, and 2007–2008 – which were characterised by notable rises in coercive actions by China. The event data also shows a major shift in China's management of maritime disputes in 2011. The chapter highlights that since 2011, China's coercive behaviours not only increased in the number but were also qualitatively unprecedented. The event data allows the selection of incidents and crises that typify the shift in China's dispute management. These cases are analysed in detail by Chapters Five to Nine.

Chapter 5

The cable-cutting incidents, 2011

This chapter traces China's maritime coercive diplomacy against Vietnam through two seismic cable cutting incidents in 2011. To provide some background on the cases, the chapter first presents an overview of disputes in the South China Sea between China and Vietnam and outlines the tensions over energy resources between the two countries since the 1990s. It then examines the two incidents in May and June 2011, in which Chinese vessels severed the cables of Vietnamese oil survey ships within Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf, thereby exhibiting tools and China's coercive tactics, as well as evaluating their effectiveness. The chapter then explains the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy by investigating the asymmetry of motivation, the asymmetry of power, and the U.S.' involvement. It concludes with an analytical summary.

5.1. Background

Tensions caused by disagreements over the exclusive control over the exploration and exploitation of natural resources – particularly oil and natural gas – in the overlapping areas of China's nine-dash line and Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf date back to the early 1990s. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in May 1992, Beijing used 'unorthodox means' when awarding an oil exploration concession to a U.S.-based company, Crestone Energy Corporation, to prospect for oil and gas in a 25,000-km² area of Vanguard Bank-21 (Roberts 1996, 20; L. T. Lee 1999, 63), which lies more than 650 nautical miles from the Chinese coast and 200 nautical miles from Vietnam (*The Economist* 2015). This area overlapped with several Vietnamese oil blocks.³³ At the time, the President of Crestone claimed that Beijing had promised to protect the operation in Vanguard Bank-21 with its own naval power (L. T. Lee 1999, 63, 94; *Bangkok Post* 1993; Hayton 2014, 124–28). In 1994, Crestone carried out seismological surveys in Vanguard Bank-21, amidst Vietnamese opposition. A month after China signed the contract with Crestone, Vietnam responded in kind by signing a deal with a Norwegian company covering the same area (Emmers 2012, 78). It also granted exploration concessions to the Mobil Oil Company, BP and Australia's BHP for areas to the west of the Crestone block (Roberts 1996, 20). In 1994, Vietnam granted the Blue Dragon field – an area adjoining Vanguard Bank-21 – to a Mobil consortium (L. T. Lee 1999, 98; Amer 2002, 9–13). In 1996, China's contract with Crestone was transferred to Benton Oil and Gas (Hayton 2014, 129; *The Economist* 2015). However, neither China nor Vietnam have ever extracted a single barrel of oil from Vanguard Bank-21 (Hayton 2014, 129). Besides Vanguard Bank, PetroVietnam has cooperated with various foreign oil and gas corporations from Indonesia, South Korea, Russia, the UK, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, France, Canada, and Malaysia to conduct exploratory surveys and drillings in many other blocks located in Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf throughout the 1990s (L. T. Lee 1999, 94).

In the late 2000s, tensions in the energy domain rose again when Chinese diplomats

³³ According to Vietnam, this area is fully within their EEZ and continental shelf, and overlaps with oil blocks 133, 134, and 158, and part of oil blocks 135, 136 and 137. For more details see: (D. Tran 2002, 87–88, 90)

threatened numerous international energy companies with economic penalties regarding their business activities in China if they continued to work with Vietnam in the South China Sea (US DOS 2009; Hayton 2014, 136–40; Do 2016b, 139–40). Following this pressure, BP suspended its planned seismic survey in Block 5.2 in the Nam Con Son Basin off the southern Vietnamese coast in 2007 (Hayton 2014, 137–38). A Japanese consortium also halted its seismic survey plans in nearby Blocks 5.1b and 5.1c and Chevron suspended operations in Block 122 in the Phu Khanh Basin (Hayton 2014, 138). In early 2008, BP and ConocoPhillips withdrew from their project altogether in Blocks 5.2 and 5.3 (Hayton 2014, 140). Besides awarding oil and gas concessions in disputed areas and pressurising energy companies to cease working with Vietnam, China sent PLAN ships to harass Russian and Norwegian vessels contracted by Vietnam to explore its continental shelf for the purposes of the CLCS submission in 2007–2008, according to a 2009 leaked cable from the American Embassy in Beijing (US DOS 2009). However, the location and the nature of the harassment remain unknown because neither China nor Vietnam have provided a public account of these incidents.

In late May and early June 2011, Chinese vessels severed the seismic cables of two Vietnamese ships, *Binh Minh 02* and *Viking II*, which were conducting oil survey activities in Vietnam's oil Block 148 and Block 136-03, respectively. The next section examines China's objectives and its use of maritime coercive diplomacy in these two incidents.

5.2. China's interests, objectives, and capabilities

Since early 2011, China has sought more dependence on the marine industries as a strategic development move (*Global Times* 2011a). In March 2011, the Chinese achieved a breakthrough in maritime strategy with the 12th Five-year Plan (2011–2015), which included a Maritime Development Strategy. While the country's 11th Five-year Plan (2006–2010) had only one section related to the seas, an entirely new chapter on developing the marine economy was included in the 12th Five-year Plan (Costa 2018; Masuda 2014, 61). This new chapter was titled *Promote the development of marine economy*, and clearly established policy guidelines for "developing and implementing a marine development strategy based on unified sea and land planning, improving marine development and control capabilities, and strengthening integrated maritime management" (Masuda 2014, 61; Terada 2014, 231). As some observers point out, by utilising the phrase "marine development strategy", Beijing is highlighting the significance of the maritime sector in the context of economic development (Masuda 2014, 61). Central within this strategy is China's aspiration to develop and utilise marine resources for the purpose of securing energy (Masuda 2014, 61). The target of promoting the development and exploitation of marine resources, such as oil and natural gas, was incorporated into China's 12th Five-year Plan (Masuda 2014, 62). Within Chinese policy-making circles, calls for eliminating or at least mitigating energy risk through resource development in the South China Sea have intensified significantly around this time (*Huaxia Shibao* 2011; Masuda 2014, 62). It is worth noting that, only three days before the 26 May cable-cutting incident, China also launched its most advanced deep-sea oil platform, HYSY 981, which is capable of drilling at a depth of 3,000 metres. This achievement helped China join the club of few countries in the world capable of building deep-water drilling equipment (*Thanhnie News* 2011e; *Global Times* 2011a; Collins and Erickson 2011; *Vietnamnet* 2011a). According to Zhao Ying at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, HYSY 981 is therefore "strategically important" to allow China to tap resources in the South China Sea (*Global Times* 2011a).

As noted in the previous chapter, China has been calling for joint oil and gas exploration as part of dispute management in the South China Sea for decades. Through maritime coercion, it forcefully persuaded Vietnam into accepting China's joint development. Wu Shicun said that "[s]ince Vietnam, the Philippines and other disputing countries do not want 'joint development', China should also take the initiative at an appropriate time to engage in development [...]" (Huanqiu 2011b). In part, maritime coercion, such as cutting cables, was a Chinese reaction to Vietnamese exploration activities in Chinese-claimed waters. According to Vietnam News Agency, seismic survey activities in Blocks 125, 126, 148 and 149 within Vietnam's claimed continental shelf, as conducted by the *Binh Minh 02*, were part of a 2011 oil and gas exploration programme approved by PetroVietnam (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a). The *Binh Minh 02* had carried out the first survey in these areas in 2010 and had conducted the second survey on 17 March 2011 (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a). For decades, such exploration and exploitation activities of resources were considered illegal and provocative by China's leadership. Furthermore, the locations where the incidents took place – Block 148 and Block 136-03 – lie within the nine-dash line, but beyond the area that China could sustain a claim to as part of an EEZ generated by sovereignty over the Paracel or Spratly Islands under UNCLOS (Chubb 2016, 232). Thus, from the Chinese perspective, the increase in oil exploration by Vietnam in 'marginal areas' weakened China's already-weak claims and raised new challenges to China's prospects of accessing valuable resources in the South China Sea (Chubb 2016, 232–33, 245).

Lastly, China was willing to exercise maritime coercive diplomacy due to the increased material capabilities, particularly in respect to paramilitary forces. In the years immediately preceding 2011, China made a concerted effort to expand its maritime paramilitary forces, especially the CMS, which was controlled by the SOA at the time (IISS 2011, 2). In 1999 and 2000, China initiated CMS and Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) shipbuilding projects (Chubb 2016, 232), and between 2009 and 2012, the Chinese government significantly raised its investment into new ships (Martinson 2018, 18; Morris 2017, 79). In 2010, the CMS launched the construction of 36 patrol ships and 54 speedboats (*People's Daily Online* 2011). According to the China Ocean Development Report 2011, 12 inspection ships were added to the fleet in 2010 (Q. Wang 2011a). As Carl Thayer notes, China "brazenly" asserted its sovereignty by actions, such as harassing oil exploration vessels, and had "the preponderance of vessels to enforce this" (Bland and Hille 2011).

With an expanding new fleet of marine surveillance ships (Torode 2011a), China's Bureau of Fisheries announced in December 2010 that China would strengthen its fisheries management in "sensitive" waters, including the South China Sea (*Kyodo News Service* 2010; Pedrozo 2011, 7; USCC 2011, 169). 2011 also witnessed a new focus of Chinese coastal forces. In February 2011, SOA Director Liu Cigui announced that SOA's aims for 2011 included "strengthening control over jurisdictional waters", which supplemented to the previous goals of the mere "monitoring and management of jurisdictional waters" (Martinson 2018, 54–55). In early May 2011, Sun Shuxian, Deputy Director of the CMS publicly stated that China would "carry out regular sea patrols more frequently to strengthen law enforcement in Chinese related waters to safeguard the country's marine rights in 2011" (Q. Wang 2011a). The statement was made to the state media only three weeks before the first cable-cutting incident. The increased law enforcement capabilities enabled Chinese law enforcement agencies to increase maritime patrols and allowed them to actively

obstruct, evict and impede the operations of foreign vessels in Chinese-claimed waters (USCC 2011, 169; ONI 2015, 40).

Hence, China's coercive diplomacy of cutting cables and hindering Vietnamese oil and gas exploration activities through two incidents in May and June 2011 is supported by a rise in maritime capabilities and aims at achieving two major objectives: deterring Vietnam from continuing oil exploration activities in areas claimed by China and compelling Hanoi to accept joint development, thereby gaining access to natural resources in the South China Sea and strengthening China's claims.

5.3. China's maritime coercive diplomacy in two cable-cutting incidents

This section examines the maritime coercive diplomacy employed by China against Vietnam in two cable-cutting incidents in late May and early June 2011. It highlights the tactics and tools used by China and assesses the extent to which China achieved its objectives.

5.3.1. The first cable cutting, May 2011

In the early morning of 26 May 2011, while conducting seismic survey activities in oil block 148, around 120 nautical miles from Phu Yen province in South-central Vietnam, the *Binh Minh 02* – a seismic exploration vessel owned by PetroVietnam – detected three approaching Chinese patrol ships on its radar (Reuters 2011a; NCBD 2011). These three Chinese ships, which were subsequently identified as the CMS ships *Haijian 84*, *72* and *17*, moved into the survey area without warning (NCBD 2011; *Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a; V. T. Nguyen 2011). According to a Vietnamese report on the incident, an escort vessel of the *Binh Minh 02* – *Dong Nam 02* – was dispatched to prevent *Haijian 84*, and another two Vietnamese vessels – *Van Hoa 739* and *Binh An 01* – were sent to prevent *Haijian 72* and *17* (NCBD 2011). However, about one hour afterwards, at 6 am, the three Chinese ships intentionally crossed through the area where *Binh Minh 02* was working (Reuters 2011a). China's *Haijian 84* then cut across the exploration cable attached to the *Binh Minh 02*, deliberately severing it. China's *Haijian 84* threatened the *Binh Minh 02*, stating that it was violating Chinese sovereignty by conducting an illegal survey, and repeatedly demanded that the *Binh Minh 02* leave the area immediately (V. T. Nguyen 2011; *Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a; NCBD 2011). Chinese vessels then hindered the operations of the *Binh Minh 02* for around three hours (NCBD 2011; *Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a; VNA 2011a). The *Binh Minh 02* and escort vessels were forced to cease operations for the day so as to gather damaged equipment (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a).

Two days after Chinese CMS ships cut the seismic cable of the *Binh Minh 02*, Chinese fishing boats in a group of five appeared and run around the area where the *Binh Minh 02* was conducting seismic surveys, such that escort ships were forced to drive them away to ensure security for the *Binh Minh 02*. A Chinese spy plane was also spotted flying over the area where the *Binh Minh 02* operated, around 64 nautical miles to the east of Dai Lanh cape of Vietnam's Phu Yen province (*Vnexpress* 2011a; *Vietnamnet* 2011b). The *Binh Minh 02* then returned to port for maintenance (B. Pham 2011). On 1 June, it was reported that three Chinese patrol vessels had "used guns to threaten" the crew of a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Spratly Islands (*Thanhnieu News* 2011d; Amer and Li 2012; Roy 2013, 121). Also, on the same day, the Vietnamese newspaper *Tuoi Tre* reported that another seismic survey vessel – the *Viking II*, a Norwegian-

flagged vessel contracted by PetroVietnam – was disturbed on two separate occasions on 29 and 31 May while operating in the waters near Dai Hung oil field. The nationality of the ship causing disturbance on 29 May was unidentified. However, the 31 May disturbance was caused by two Chinese ships – *Fei Sheng 16* and vessel *No. BI2549* – which entered the areas where the surveys were being conducted, approached the *Viking II* and attempted to cross its tail float. However, the *Viking II*'s security ships successfully stopped them (*Thanhniên News* 2011a; Trong 2011; *Thanhniên News* 2011d).

After the cutting of the Vietnamese survey ship's exploration cable, China engaged in a war of words with Vietnam (Duong 2011). On 28 May 2011, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu justified the cable cutting by stating that "[w]hat relevant Chinese departments did was completely normal marine law-enforcement and surveillance activities in China's jurisdictional area" (Xinhua 2011a; FMPRC 2011a). The Chinese also voiced a strong opposition to Vietnam's oil and gas operations by declaring that they "undermined China's interests and jurisdictional rights in the South China Sea" (Xinhua 2011a; FMPRC 2011a; M. Li and Dylan 2015, 94). On 31 May 2011, the Chinese Foreign Ministry criticised Vietnam's offshore explorations and re-stated that their law enforcement activities by marine surveillance ships "against Vietnam's illegally operating ships" were "completely justified" (Jia 2011; Duong 2011; FMPRC 2011b). At the same time, Beijing demanded that Hanoi "immediately stop infringement activities" and warned Hanoi to "refrain from creating new troubles" (Jia 2011; FMPRC 2011b).

Taking a different approach in dealing with incidents related to harassment by Chinese vessels in the South China Sea, Hanoi made a strong response and decided to draw the world's attention to these incidents (Tonnesson 2014b, 228). On 27 May 2011, Vietnam sent a diplomatic note to the representative of the Chinese embassy in Hanoi to protest against Chinese ships' actions. Hanoi accused Beijing of violating its sovereignty right in its EEZ and continental shelf, going against the 1982 UNCLOS, and the spirit of the 2002 DOC as well as the consensus of the two countries' top leaders. The note also demanded compensation for the damage caused (VNA 2011a). Three days after the first cable-cutting incident in May, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a rare separate press conference at the weekend to air footage, distribute pictures and other documentation to the media, and condemn China's actions (Watts 2011; Do 2016b, 187). Vietnam accused China of deliberately misleading the public into considering the area to be disputed and reiterated that the area was "situate[d] entirely within the 200-nautical-mile EEZ and continental shelf of Vietnam as stipulated by the 1982 UNCLOS" and that "it [was] neither a disputed area nor an area 'managed by China'" (VNA 2011b; Duong 2011). In addition, Vietnam brought the case to the regional forum. Vietnam's Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh raised the South China Sea issues and specifically mentioned the *Binh Minh 02* cable-cutting incident in his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in early June. In his remark at the Dialogue, he claimed that the incident occurred "well within Vietnam's 200-nautical-mile EEZ" and added that the incident had raised concern from other littoral countries and over the maintenance of peace and stability in the South China Sea, as well as in the wider region (*Vnexpress* 2011b; *Thanhniên News* 2011d; VNA 2011c). Vietnam's deliberate attempts to internationalise the issue caused what Stein Tonnesson (2014b, 228) called "an international stir". According to Do Thanh Hai (2016b, 187), a Vietnamese expert on the South China Sea, the fact that Vietnam had mostly channelled its protests against China through official notes and statements from the spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for many years marked Vietnam's reaction this time as "an escalated response".

Vietnamese leaders also made strongly worded statements during this crisis. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Nguyen Phuong Nga clearly stated that " [the] Vietnamese Navy will do everything necessary to protect sovereignty and territorial integrity, serving economic development of the nation" in response to the first incident (*Vietnamnet* 2011a). At the Shangri-La Dialogue, Vietnamese Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh insisted that the nine-dashed line had no basis in international law and must not serve as the basis for any joint development deals (Torode 2011a; VNA 2011c). His Deputy, Nguyen Chi Vinh, warned that if any other party escalated the dispute, "we would not just stand back and watch" (Torode 2012; 2011a). As some experts point out, such a public stance would have been "virtually unthinkable" just 18 months earlier (Torode 2011a). Vietnam's Prime Minister at the time Nguyen Tan Dung, and President Nguyen Minh Triet made unusually strong public statements reaffirming their commitments to defending national sovereignty (Thayer 2011c, 360–61). On 7 June 2011, President Triet, visiting Co To islands off Quang Ninh province, near the China border in the Gulf of Tonkin, stated that Vietnam was "determined to protect" its islands and that "we are ready to sacrifice everything to protect our homeland, our sea and island sovereignty" (*Giao Duc* 2011a; *Nhandan Online* 2011).

After the May incident, besides allowing the government-controlled press to vigorously condemn China, Vietnamese authorities took "the unusual step" of tolerating mass anti-China protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city (Roy 2013, 121). On 5 June 2011, an estimated 300 people gathered in Hanoi and over 1,000 protestors marched in Ho Chi Minh city in front of the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese Consulate General, respectively, demanding that China stop encroaching on Vietnam's territory (*International Business Times* 2011; *Reuters* 2011c). This was the largest public anti-China demonstration allowed by the Vietnamese government since 2007.³⁴

Vietnam stood its ground by resuming the *Binh Minh 02*'s survey activities. On 5 June, *Binh Minh 02* left the Nha Trang Port to continue its seismic surveillance. The vessels were accompanied by eight escorts instead of three as previously dispatched (*Vnexpress* 2011a; *Vietnamnet* 2011b; Hayton 2014, 145).

On the part of the U.S., in early June, Admiral Robert Willards of the U.S. Navy expressed concerns about growing tensions between China and its neighbours (Watts 2011). Following this, Defence Secretary Robert Gates re-affirmed the U.S. national interest in the freedom of navigation at the Shangri-La Dialogue, after it was raised by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in Hanoi in July 2010. He also warned that further clashes could occur unless rival claimants found a way to peacefully settle their disputes (Hookway 2011). The Defence Secretary also highlighted the U.S.' determination to strengthen military presence throughout the Asia-Pacific region (Sutter and Huang 2011, 69).

More than one week after the first cable cutting, Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie, in a meeting on the sideline of the 10th Shangri-La Dialogue with Vietnamese Defence Minister

³⁴ In December 2007, after Beijing created a county-level city of Sansha to administer China's claims in the South China Sea, including the Paracel and Spratly Islands, hundreds of Vietnamese students took part in anti-China protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city for over two consecutive weekends. See: (Storey 2008, 4–5)

Phung Quang Thanh, noted that the PLA was not involved in the incident and that China did not want a similar incident to occur in the future (Thayer 2011e, 15). However, only four days after the meeting, the second cable-cutting incident took place.

5.3.2. *The second cable cutting, June 2011*

Two weeks after the first cable-cutting incident, the *Viking II* was reportedly intercepted by Chinese vessels off the coast of southern Vietnam in the southwestern portion of the South China Sea, but within Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf. According to the reports from the *Viking II*, tens of Chinese fishing boats harassing its survey activities on 8 June, one of which was the Chinese fishing boat *No. 62226* harassing the *Viking II* on the left side and then was driven away by an escort vessel – *Van Hoa 746* (*Tuoi Tre Online* 2011). On 9 June 2011, the *Viking II* was conducting 3D seismic explorations in Block 136-03, in the vicinity of Vanguard Bank, several hundred kilometres south of the site of the first cable cutting and 145 nautical miles off the southern coast of Vietnam, Chinese fishing vessel *No. 62226*, supported by two FLEC vessels *Yuzheng 303* and *311*, returned to the survey area (*Tuoi Tre Online* 2011; *Thanh Nien News* 2011c). According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' statement, Chinese fishing vessel *No. 62226* traversed the *Viking II*'s prow, then veered towards the *Viking II*'s cable lines at high speeds (VNMOFA 2011; *Thanh Nien News* 2011c; AFP 2011b). Despite warnings from a Vietnamese coastguard ship, Chinese fishing boat *No. 62226* rammed into the exploration cables of the *Viking II* and then trailed a cable-cutting device into the vicinity of the *Viking II*, becoming trapped in a network of underwater cables and preventing the *Viking II* from operating normally (*Thanh Nien News* 2011b; *Reuters* 2011c; *Vietnamplus* 2011a). Shortly afterwards, two Chinese law enforcement vessels – *Yuzheng 303* and *311* – together with several Chinese fishing boats, rushed to assist vessel *No. 62226* by cutting the streamers (VNMOFA 2011). Vietnam claimed that the actions of Chinese fishing boats and law enforcement vessels was "totally intentional, thoroughly deliberated and planned" because the Chinese boat carried a cable cutting device (VNMOFA 2011). Also, according to Vietnam, it was part of "systematic acts" by China to implement its "ambition to make the nine-dashed line claim a reality" (VNMOFA 2011; *Reuters* 2011c). Hanoi then lodged a formal complaint with the Chinese Embassy the same afternoon and sought the compensation for damages on the behalf of the PetroVietnam (*Reuters* 2011c; AFP 2011b).

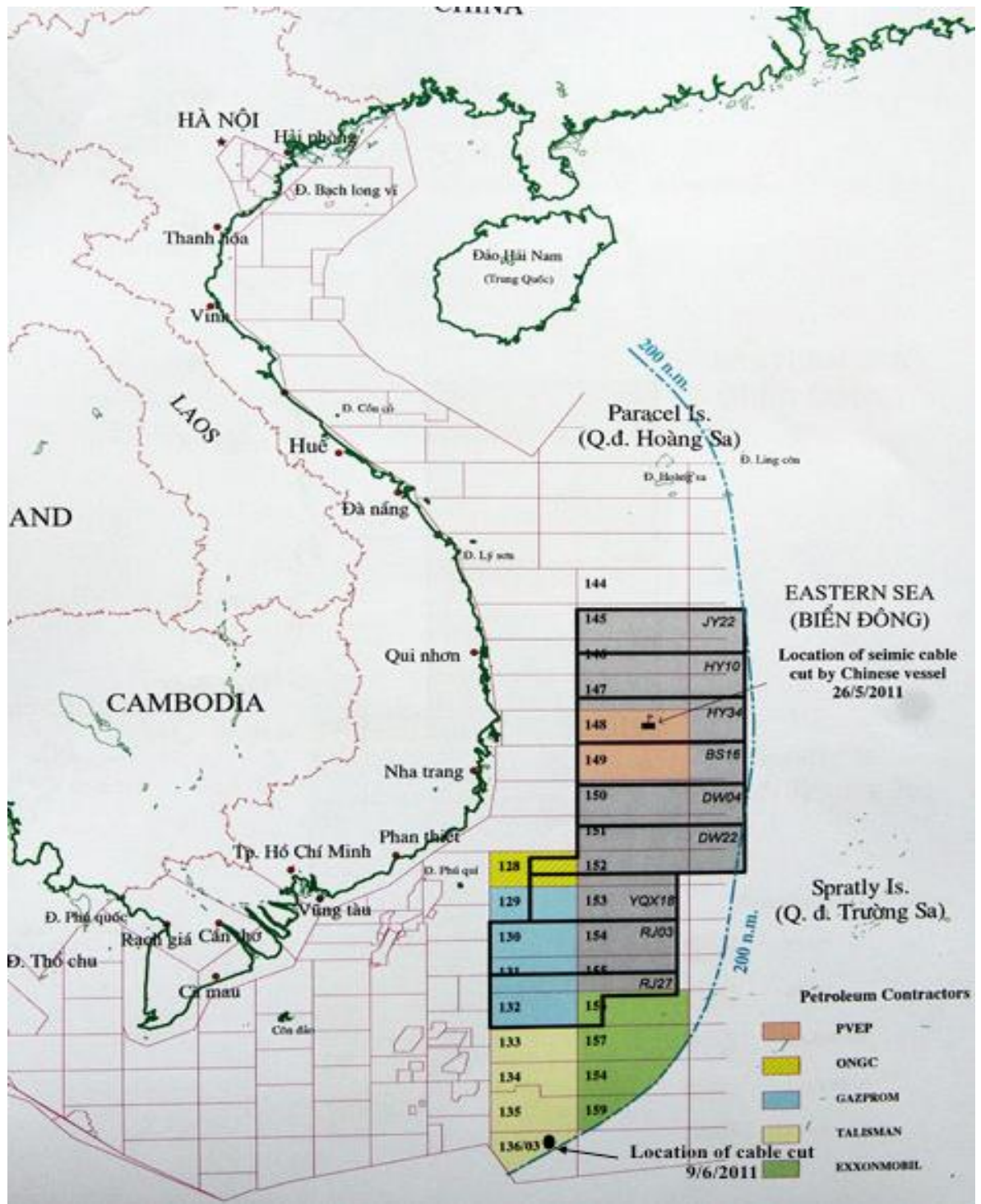


Figure 5: **Locations of 2011 cable-cutting incidents**

Source: PetroVietnam (VPI), available at: <https://www.vpi.pvn.vn/vn/ViewNews.aspx?gid=1&Id=650> (accessed on 13 September 2015) and compiled by author.

In contrast to its reaction to the first cable-cutting incident, for which China did not deny that its vessels deliberately cut the cable, for the second cable-cutting incident, China refuted Vietnam's accusation, and instead firmly blamed Vietnam for the encounter. According to the Chinese account, the Chinese fishing boats were chased away by Vietnamese ships. During the incident, a Chinese fishing boat's net became entangled with the cables of the *Viking II* and the ship was dragged along for over an hour before the entangled net could be cut by the two law enforcement ships (FMPRC 2011c). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei not only blamed Vietnam for endangering its fishermen's lives but also claimed that by "conducting unlawful oil and gas surveys in the Vanguard Bank waters [...] Vietnam grossly infringed China's sovereignty as well as maritime rights and interests". Again, China demanded that Vietnam "stop all actions that violate China's sovereignty" and "not take actions that would complicate and expand disputes" (FMPRC 2011c; *BBC News* 2011). On the same day as the second incident occurred, China's Ambassador to the Philippines, Liu Jianchao, delivered a warning message over the oil exploration activities in the South China Sea by claiming that China was not looking for oil in the disputed waters, such that no other country should either. Ambassador Liu warned other claimants, including Vietnam, to "stop searching for the possibility of exploiting resources in these areas where China has its claims". He also added that China was open to engaging other countries in joint oil and gas exploration and emphasised that "we will never use force unless we are attacked" (*BBC News* 2011; AP 2011a). The same day the second cable cutting incident took place, China's Ministry of Defence also announced that a formation of ships from the PLAN would hold a naval exercise later that month in the western Pacific Ocean (Buckley 2011; Do 2016b, 188; *Reuters* 2011b).

When the second incident unfolded, Prime Minister Dung stated "[w]e continue to affirm strongly and to manifest the strongest determination of all the Party, of all the people and of all the army in protecting Vietnamese sovereignty in maritime zones of the country". He also reaffirmed "the incontestable maritime sovereignty of Vietnam" towards the Paracel and Spratly Islands (*Thanhniên News* 2011d; AFP 2011a). Public comments of national leaders indicate the seriousness with which Vietnam viewed China's coercion (AFP 2011a). In response to the incident, Vietnam raised the stakes by immediately announcing live-firing exercises (Thayer 2011e, 19), which the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry characterised as "a routine annual training activity of the Vietnam navy" (Ruwitch 2011). However, this was the first time that the Vietnamese government had publicised such an exercise (Roy 2013, 121). The state-owned Northern Maritime Safety Corp warned boats and ships not to operate in the area during the exercises, representing the first time Vietnam had issued such an alert about conducting maritime drills (Mason 2011). The live-firing naval exercises were conducted on 13 June 2011 and had two phases. The first phase involved coastal artillery, while the second phase involved guided missile corvettes firing their deck guns (Thayer 2011c, 360–61). This drill, however, was conducted close to land off Quang Nam province in central Vietnam and did not involve the firing of anti-ship missiles (Demick 2011). It can therefore be inferred that Hanoi was careful to avoid overly provoking Beijing (Demick 2011). Nevertheless, the drill was intended to send China a message (Timberlake 2011c). Such a drill demonstrated a resolve to protect its claimed national territory and its rights to exploit resources (*Thanhniên News* 2011e). Prime Minister Dung issued the same day a decree specifying who would be exempt from military call-up at a time of war (*BBC* 2011; *VOA* 2011; Thayer 2011c, 360–61), which took effect from 1 August 2011. This decree on conscription regulation was the

first since 1979.

Meanwhile, Hanoi continued to exploit nationalist sentiment to exert additional pressure on China (Do 2016b, 189). Anti-China protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City continued to take place every Sunday for about two months after 5 June (D. Koh 2012, 371–72; Do 2016b, 189). According to Do Thanh Hai (2016b, 189), it was obvious that anti-China rallies could not happen without toleration from the authorities. Vietnam usually takes heavy-handed measures against public protests and tightly controls the internet and media, such that the tolerance of anti-China gatherings and commentaries was an indication of its displeasure with Beijing (Timberlake 2011b). In other words, the protests fit a strategy by Vietnam to show its displeasure with China (Timberlake 2011b) and the pressure is on China to stop coercive acts (Timberlake 2011a).

While official statements expressed firmness, Chinese authorities allowed the media to publish threatening commentaries and editorials. On 11 June, an editorial published in an English-language newspaper published by the CCP – the *Global Times* – stated that, "[i]f Vietnam insists on making trouble, thinking that the more trouble it makes, the more benefits it gains, then we truly wish to remind those in Vietnam who determine policy to please read your history", which was taken by some to be an apparent reference to China's punitive 1979 invasion of Vietnam (AP 2011b). Another *Global Times* editorial on 21 June 2011 stated that "[i]f Vietnam wishes to create a war in the South China Sea, China will resolutely keep them company. China has the absolute might to crush the naval fleets sent from Vietnam. China will show no mercy to its rival due to 'global impact' concerns" (Thayer 2011g, 3; Roy 2013, 121–22; *Inquirer* 2011). The rhetoric in the Chinese state media was vehement (Scott 2012, 1029), declaring that "China has to send a clear message that it will take whatever measures necessary to protect its interests in the South China Sea" and that "[i]f Vietnam continues to provoke China in this region, China will first deal with it with maritime police forces, and if necessary, strike back with naval forces" (*Global Times* 2011d). More than a week after the second cable-cutting incident, China unveiled an expansion plan of its offshore surveillance force in the *People's Daily* with the announced purpose of ensuring that the country's maritime interests would be fully protected (Q. Wang 2011b). According to the plan, the CMS personnel would increase from 9,000 to 15,000 by 2020 and the patrol fleet would be expanded to 350 vessels during the period of the 12th Five-year Plan timeframe and more than 520 vessels by 2020 (*People's Daily Online* 2011; Q. Wang 2011b; *The Telegraph* 2011). On 15 June 2011, China also dispatched its largest civilian maritime patrol ship, the 3,000-ton and helicopter-equipped *Haixun-31*, to pass through the contested Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea on its way to its first-ever visit to Singapore (Sutter and Huang 2011, 70; AFP 2011d; *People's Daily Online* 2011; Q. Wang 2011b).

Tensions also spilled-over into cyberspace. According to Vietnam's state-linked Back Khoa Internet work Security Centre, more than 200 Vietnamese websites were attacked during early June 2011. Among the sites targeted were those of the Vietnamese Ministries of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs upon which hackers posted information in Chinese and the images of the Chinese flag (Timberlake 2011a; 2011c).

Vietnam stood its ground, deciding to continue its survey operations in the same area (B. Pham 2011; Da and Vo 2011). One day after Chinese vessels snared the *Viking II's* cable, PetroVietnam also announced that the *Viking II* would resume its survey activities as soon as they

assessed the damage and repaired equipment (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011b). On 14 June, it was reported that the *Viking II* had already resumed its surveys in Vietnam's claimed EEZ (*Giao Duc* 2011b).

The U.S. continued to involve itself more directly into South China Sea issues. Following the *Viking II* cable-cutting incident unfolded, U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said that the U.S. was "troubled" by tensions triggered by the maritime border dispute in the South China Sea and that "they only serve to raise tensions and don't help peace and security in the region" (AFP 2011c). He added that the U.S. supported a "collaborative diplomatic process" (AFP 2011c). When asked about the possible role of the U.S. in resolving disputes, Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga commented that "[e]very effort by the international community toward maintaining peace and stability in the Eastern Sea (South China Sea) is welcome" (Ruwitch 2011). On 13 June, Senator Jim Webb – a major figure in U.S. foreign policy – pledged to introduce a resolution urging China to enter into multilateral talks on maritime territorial disputes with its neighbours (*Thanhniem News* 2011e). Also, on 14 June 2011, the U.S. and Vietnam announced plans to conduct joint naval drills in the South China Sea in July of that year (Torode 2011b; *Radio Free Asia* 2011). From 17 to 19 June 2011, the U.S. and Vietnam held the 4th Political, Security and Defence Dialogue in Washington D.C. The meeting, was explained by the U.S. State Department as "broadening and deepening the strategic dimensions of our U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship", particularly for "maritime security in the South China Sea" (US DOS 2011a; Scott 2012, 1030). For the first time since the normalisation of relations between the two countries in 1995, in this meeting, Vietnam and the U.S. began to discuss specific measures to elevate bilateral relations to "strategic partnership" level (VNA 2011d), a classification used by Vietnam to describe countries with which it has particularly close bilateral relations (*Bao Moi* 2011b; *Bao Moi* 2011a; Thayer 2012a, 76). Moreover, following the dialogue, the U.S. and Vietnam issued a joint statement, in which the U.S. reiterated that "troubling incidents in recent months do not foster peace and stability within the region and raise concerns about maritime security" (US DOS 2011b). The joint statement also called for resolving all territorial disputes in the South China Sea "through a collaborative, diplomatic process without coercion or the use of force" (US DOS 2011b).

The PRC's Foreign Ministry commented frequently, albeit indirectly on the enhanced level of U.S. involvement. On 14 June, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that "[w]e hope non-parties respect the directly-concerned parties' efforts to resolve disputes through direct negotiation". Whilst Beijing did not publicly oppose Hanoi's efforts to seek warming relations with the U.S., security cooperation between Washington and Hanoi prompted unease. From the Chinese perspective, it is the U.S.' effort to react to China's threat to American strategic benefits and its leading position in the Asia Pacific regions, and it is Vietnam's attempt to align with the U.S. to softly balance against China (Xin 2014, 116–17).

Beijing resorted to shows of force to convey a deterrent signal. From 14 to 16 June 2011, China held maritime exercises, including live-fire drills around Hainan Island for three days and nights (CCTV 2011a; Sutter and Huang 2011, 75). Two points are worth noting regarding this. First, these drills were the first joint armed exercises in which the PLAN forces participated alongside units from civilian agencies including Chinese Maritime Police and CMS (CCTV 2011a; R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768). According to China Central Television (CCTV) report, drills involved a total of 14 patrol boats, landing craft and submarine hunting boats, along with two fighter planes

(CCTV 2011a). The content of these exercises was "defending atolls and protecting sea lanes" (Sutter and Huang 2011, 75; Ng 2011). The exercises were, first and foremost, aimed at compelling Hanoi to accept the joint development of natural resources. According to Xu Guangyu, a retired PLA General and an analyst with the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, tough actions including more drills were intended to "push the other side back to the negotiation table" (Ng 2011). Air Force Major General Qiao Liang also made a similar remark, stating that "[w]e must let the other side know that they can all still benefit from joint development [...]. The point must not only be conveyed through military exercises, but must also be made clear [...], even by issuing an ultimatum" (EEO 2011). Second, China staged these exercises on the same day that the U.S. and Vietnam announced a joint naval exchange and concluded them only one day before the 4th U.S.-Vietnam Political, Security, and Defence Dialogue held on 17 June 2011. The timing suggests that the PLA's series of military exercises at this sensitive time were also aimed at conveying a clear warning signal to deter Vietnamese leaders from taking action, that China believed was aimed at partnering with the U.S. to contain China and would undermine China's strategic interests (Ng 2011; Wen Wei Po 2011). According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in June 2011, six major exercises were held by the PLAN (IISS 2011, 1).

In response, Vietnam mixed its firmness with some restraint. Hanoi made clear attempts to "compartmentalise" South China Sea tensions, preventing them from spilling over and negatively affecting the bilateral relations with China (Thayer 2012f, 5; Do 2016b, 189). Immediately following talks with the U.S. in Washington D.C, Vietnam conducted the 11th Joint naval patrol with Chinese naval ships in the Gulf of Tonkin for two days from 19 to 20 June. Vietnamese ships even called at the port of Zhanjiang, Guangdong for the second time, before returning home (AP 2011c; *Viet Nam News* 2011; Xinhua 2011b). Some Chinese experts interpret this as Hanoi's attempt to ease Chinese concerns and Vietnamese government's way of trying to prevent China from taking further punitive measures that might trigger stronger anti-government protests in Vietnam (R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768). In addition to the joint patrol mission on 25 June 2011 – the same day that the U.S. and China held their first ever Consultations on the Asia-Pacific affairs in Hawaii (US DOS 2011c) – Vietnam dispatched a special envoy, Deputy Foreign Minister Ho Xuan Son, to Beijing to discuss the South China Sea issues and measures to reduce tensions between the two countries with his Chinese counterpart, Zhang Zhijun. Significantly, Ho Xuan Son was also received by Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo (*Reuters* 2011d; E. Wong 2011b; Thayer 2011b, 90). The two sides issued a joint press release and indicated that they "laid stress on the need to steer public opinion along the correct direction, avoiding comments and deeds that harm the friendship and trust of the people of the two countries" (*Vietnamplus* 2011b). In addition, they agreed to raise the tempo of negotiations so as to early sign an Agreement on Basic Principles Guiding the Settlement of Sea Issues between Vietnam and China (*Vietnamplus* 2011b). According to Carl Thayer (2011b, 87; 2011f), there was a third cable-cutting incident reportedly occurring in late June 2011, but Vietnam decided not to publicise the matter and inflame relations with China. Following the visit of the special envoy, Hanoi's security forces forestalled all attempts to organise anti-China protests. In August 2011, the municipal People's Committee of Hanoi issued a public notice ordering an end to all gatherings, marches and demonstration activities in the city (*Vietnamplus* 2011c). By the end of August 2011, no rally happened (Do 2016b, 189). In October 2011, Vietnamese Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong visited China and witnessed the signing ceremony of the Agreement on Basic Principles Guiding the Settlement of Sea Issues.

5.3.3. Outcome: An evaluation

In just two weeks, Chinese ships cut Vietnamese seismic survey cables twice. China used fishing boats and law enforcement vessels to deter Vietnam from continuing its oil and gas exploration within the latter's claimed EEZ and continental shelf. China repeatedly hindered Vietnamese oil exploration activities, harassed and physically confronted Vietnamese vessels by cutting their cables. These represent piecemeal restrictions of Vietnam's rights to undertake surveys, exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources in areas that China claims.

Despite coercive diplomacy efforts, China failed to achieve its objectives in the disputes. Cutting cables failed to deter Vietnam from continued exploration in Chinese-claimed waters or compel it to accept any kind of joint development to allow China to access to natural resources. Exploration activities in the Block 148 and in Vanguard Bank were resumed immediately after the incidents and have been sustained by Vietnam over the following years.³⁵ A strong reaction from Vietnam might have prompted China to make subtle adjustments to its coercive diplomacy tactics during the crisis. While China did not deny its deliberation in the 26 May incident, the Chinese authorities portrayed the cutting of cables on 9 June as "an act of self-preservation" (Hayton 2014, 145–46). Also, the first incident was characterised by an aggressive tactic undertaken by government vessels from the CMS, whereas the second incident was carried out by the fishing boats with the support of the FLEC. In November 2012, another cable incident was reported, during which the *Binh Minh 02*'s seismic survey cable was once again broken by two Chinese fishing boats (Bland, Hook, and Nguyen 2012; *Petrotimes* 2012; *Vietnamplus* 2012; Sutter and Huang 2013a, 71). Nevertheless, the 2012 incident involved only Chinese fishing vessels and no government vessels became directly involved or provided support to the fishing vessels, as they did in the two 2011 incidents.

However, China appears to have been successful in achieving its objective of deterring Hanoi from taking actions against China's strategic interests by getting closer to Washington. After China resorted to a show of force by conducting the first-ever joint exercises with the participation of both the PLAN and civilian maritime law enforcement agencies in the South China Sea, and managed its relationship with Washington by engaging in the first U.S.-China Consultations on the Asia-Pacific affairs, Hanoi immediately made efforts to balance its position between the U.S. and China, taking the initiative to ease tensions.

5.4. Explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

The following section examines the role of a more direct U.S. involvement, the asymmetry of motivation, and the asymmetry of military power in explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

5.4.1. The asymmetry of motivation

³⁵ In July 2017 and March 2018, Vietnam halted two oil projects in Block 136-03 and the nearby Block 07-03 (known as 'Red-Emperor' development), respectively. The decision to halt the development drilling in 2017 was reportedly taken by the Vietnamese government after China threatened to attack Vietnamese outposts, while the work on Red Emperor was abandoned because of a show of military force by Beijing, including the sailing of a 40-ship flotilla near the oil well. See more: (Hayton 2017a; 2017b; 2018b; Pearson and Gloystein 2018; Hutt 2019)

In order to assess the extent to which the asymmetry of motivation affects the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy it is necessary to examine three elements: the coercer's motivation to escalate, the nature and magnitude of the coercer's demand, and the target's will to resist.

According to George and Simons' (1994, 281–82) criteria for asymmetry of motivation, China did not possess an advantage in the disputes over natural resources within Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf for three reasons. First, it can be argued that the nature of China's objective determined the limits of its coercive diplomacy. During the crisis, China repeatedly demanded that Vietnam stop so-called "illegal" exploration activities. However, while China's Ambassador to the Philippines, Liu Jianchao, warned other claimants, including Vietnam, to stop searching for oil in areas claimed by China on the day of the *Viking II* cable cutting, he also added that China was open to engaging them in joint oil and gas exploration (*BBC News* 2011; AP 2011a). In reality, the vast majority of oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea lie in shallow waters close to the shorelines of the coastal Southeast Asian countries (see the map in Appendix C). China cannot unilaterally explore and exploit oil and natural gas without cooperation from other claimants in these areas. For decades, China has called for the negotiation of joint development proposals in the South China Sea. Hence, the nature of China's objective – stopping Vietnamese exploration activities in order to seek future access to the areas' natural resources through joint development – requires Vietnam's collaboration, such that heavy-handed coercion would be ineffective. Second, Beijing's motivation was weakened by the fact that the issue of exploiting oil and gas in the areas where its nine-dash line overlaps with Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf was not considered to be particularly urgent. China's access to oil and gas in these areas at that time had no immediate effect on its energy security or economic development, such that China's maritime coercive diplomacy was primarily aimed at countering challenges and guaranteeing future access. To date, not a single Chinese oil well has been dug in the disputed areas in the South China Sea (Hayton 2014, 129; You 2013, 2). Third, besides gaining access to natural resources, joint development itself has another, even more important, objective, which is to strengthen China's nine-dash line claim. This is apparently a long-term goal.

The situation, however, was entirely different for Vietnam. China's demands undermined Vietnam's sovereign rights and economic interests. In fact, after the first cable-cutting incident, the Vietnamese sources made public that this was not the first time that Chinese ships had hindered Vietnamese oil exploration activities and cut Vietnamese survey ships' cables.³⁶ However, according to Vietnam's Deputy Defence Minister, Nguyen Chi Vinh, the previous instances occurred either in areas beyond Vietnam's 200-nautical-mile EEZ or in contested waters. The May cable-cutting incident, by contrast, took place deep within Vietnam's claimed EEZ. Also, the Chinese government vessels directly harassed a civilian ship in Vietnam's claimed waters. Vinh described this as a "violent act" (Da and Vo 2011). In other words, deliberate government-instructed disruptions of exploration survey activities well within Vietnam's EEZ are not acceptable (*Thanhniem News* 2011e). This suggests that the location in which Beijing chose to take action reached Hanoi's red-line. Similarly, China's demand was well beyond Hanoi's limit. If Hanoi had complied with Beijing's demand and abandoned its sovereign rights over the waters which are

³⁶ After the May incident, it was made known to the public that in 2010, when Vietnam was conducting surveys to complete its dossier on boundaries of the continental shelf to submit to the UN, Chinese vessels also cut Vietnamese ships' survey cables. That incident, however, was unreported in the press at the time. See: (VNA 2011c; Bland and Hille 2011; Da and Vo 2011)

firmly recognised by international law, this would have been interpreted as a giving up of its legal rights in other areas well within its EEZ and continental shelf. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter Four, China's formulation of joint development is "sovereignty belongs to China, set aside disputes, pursue joint development". Accepting joint development in these areas is therefore equal to giving up exclusive rights and giving a nod to Chinese sovereignty. Such a move would have significant implications for Vietnam's overall sovereignty and maritime claims over the Spratly and Paracel Islands.

Furthermore, its dependence on South China Sea oil and gas motivated Vietnam to resist China's demands. The oil and gas production has become a major source of wealth for Vietnam. By the early 2010s, PetroVietnam had become Vietnam's biggest conglomerate, accounting for about 20 percent of the country's GDP and contributing to 25–30 percent of the government's annual revenue (PetroVietnam 2011, 3; H. H. Le 2014, 179). South China Sea oil and gas also have become even more important to Vietnam following the country's rise in energy demand, as instigated by economic development. From 2001 to 2011, Vietnam's oil consumption increased by 6.4 percent annually, reaching 16.5 million tons in 2011 (BP 2012, 11; H. H. Le 2014, 179). However, Vietnam's annual oil production has declined recently, falling from a peak production of 20.1 million tons in 2004 down to 15.2 million tons in 2011 (GSO (General Statistics Office) 2008, 415; 2012, 463; H. H. Le 2014, 179). This has raised Vietnamese concerns over energy security, and led PetroVietnam to increase investment into foreign oil fields and intensify exploration and exploitation activities within Vietnam's continental shelf (H. H. Le 2014, 180). As noted previously, PetroVietnam approved an oil and gas exploration programme for 2011, which included Binh Minh 02's seismic survey activities in Blocks 125, 126, 148 and 149 (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2011a). In contrast to China's situation, continuing oil and gas exploration and exploitation is Vietnam's urgent need. That explains why Hanoi resisted to China's demand for stopping its exploration activities within its EEZ.

The Vietnamese strategy of publicising the incident, mobilising anti-China sentiments and even threatening to take all necessary measures to defend its interests after the first cable-cutting incident in May did not prevent China from repeating its obstruction of oil and gas exploration. However, Vietnam's hard-line response was not ignored on the Chinese side. One Chinese scholar commented that Vietnam's live-fire drill "is undoubtedly intended as a military show of force towards China", also stating that "[t]hrough the flexing of its muscle, Vietnam wants to demonstrate its resolution to maintain its claims on the Nansha Islands (Spratly Islands)" (Global Times 2011b). Li Hongmei (2011), the Editor of *People Daily's Online*, called Vietnam's response "the first ever preemptive move over 32 years to infuriate China", characterising it as "unusual" and "thought-provoking". According to Li (2011), as "a military underdog", Vietnam made efforts to rally international support, such that "China has to [tread] a little more carefully". As a result, China made subtle adjustments in handling the two events. While the crew of Chinese government ships from CMS actively and deliberately cut the cable of the Vietnamese survey vessel in the May incident, Chinese fishing boats were the principle protagonists with the support from the FLEC ships in the June incident. Regardless of whether the second incident was purposeful or accidental, it indicates that China deliberately avoided escalation. If China did deliberately cut the cable, an effort was made to reduce the risk by replacing the government vessel with a fishing boat. If the incident was an accident, then China also attempted to be more skilful to avoid direct confrontation with Vietnam (M. Li 2012, 13). As previously mentioned, besides blaming Vietnam for conducting

illegal oil and gas operations, Beijing also tried to justify its action on the grounds that it was trying to save the Chinese fishermen and fishing boat from danger (FMPRC 2011c; M. Li 2012, 13). Such asymmetry of motivation limited the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy and contributed to the failure at deterring Vietnam from continuing to conduct its exploration activities in the South China Sea.

However, it should be noted that Hanoi's objective during these episodes of cable-cuttings was limited. The Vietnamese government only sought to counter Chinese harassment and obstruction of oil and gas exploration activities deemed vitally important to its economic development and in the areas over which it is entitled to exercise sovereign rights under international law. Hanoi had no desire to let the dispute disrupt its relations with China. Maintaining good and stable relations with Beijing has always been regarded by Hanoi as a foreign policy priority. On the contrary, a closer relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam manifested in an enhanced security cooperation strongly links to China's strategic interests. For China, such activities demonstrated Vietnam's intent to partner with the U.S. to contain China (R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768). Du Jifeng, of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, remarked that "Vietnam is clearly mingling with the US to suppress China" (Ng 2011). In this respect, the asymmetry of motivation worked in China's favour and explains why China was successful in forcefully persuading Vietnam to pursue restraint in its approach towards the U.S. and subsequently to become the first to take initiative to ease tensions.

5.4.2. U.S. involvement

One year before the cable-cutting incidents, the U.S. took steps to insert itself more directly into South China Sea disputes (McDevitt 2015, 33). At the ARF held in Hanoi in July 2010, in light of growing tensions over conflicting territorial claims between the PRC and various Southeast Asian littoral countries, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly involved the U.S. in the South China Sea issue (McDevitt 2015, 33). She offered Washington's assistance in facilitating multiparty talks over disputed waters of the South China Sea and stated that the U.S. is opposed to any use of coercion or threats of force to resolve conflicting claims. Secretary Clinton also justified her statement of concern by noting that the U.S. had "national interests" in freedom of navigation, maintaining the region open for international commerce and trade, and upholding international law in the South China Sea.

The U.S. continued to follow this line of wading into the South China Sea issue in 2011, engaging in a number of diplomatic and naval exchanges with Vietnam during the cable-cutting-induced tensions. As mentioned earlier, on 17 June, the U.S. and Vietnam announced joint naval exchange to be conducted in July 2011. The U.S. described this as part of a pattern of annual drills with regional allies and partners (Torode 2011b). The collaboration took place for seven days and focused on non-combatant training and skills exchanges in areas, such as navigation and maintenance (NNS (Navy News Service) 2011). U.S. units participating in the naval exchange activities included the guided missile destroyers USS *Chung-Hoon* and USS *Preble*, and the rescue and salvage ship USNS *Safeguard* (NNS (Navy News Service) 2011). Although the U.S. Seventh Fleet spokesman, Commander Jeff Davis, claimed that the moves had long been scheduled and were not a reaction to recent events, he added that "[o]bviously we always watch the South China Sea carefully" (Torode 2011b).

At the 18th ARF, held in Bali on 22 July 2011, Secretary Clinton specifically mentioned the cable-cutting incidents and expressed her concerns. She stated that they "endanger the safety of life at sea, escalate tensions, undermine freedom of navigation, and pose risks to lawful unimpeded commerce and economic development" (Song 2016, 252–53). A week before Clinton's remarks at the ARF, two U.S. Senators – John Kerry and John McCain – sent a letter to the Chinese State Councillor, Dai Bingguo, to express U.S. concerns over the series of incidents and warned that "if appropriate steps are not taken to calm the situation, future incidents could escalate, jeopardising the vital national interests of the U.S." (Song 2016, 252–53). The letter reiterated the U.S.' long-standing position that "the U.S. does not take a position on the overlapping territorial claims in this region", but also emphasised that "we do maintain a deep and abiding interest in ensuring freedom of navigation, commerce, and economic exploration; maintaining U.S. commitment to our allies and partners" (Song 2016, 252–53).

The Chinese had a mixed assessment. On the one hand, China well acknowledged the limit in U.S. involvement and the U.S.-Vietnam cooperation. China assessed the military exchanges between Vietnam and the U.S. as a tactical arrangement. Zhang Zhaozhong, of the PLA National Defence University, commented during a CCTV interview that "[t]his exercise is still at a tactical level [because it is] not the same as those with its [the U.S.] allies" (CCTV 2011b). Other Chinese analysts noted that compared with the joint exercises the U.S. held elsewhere in Southeast Asia, those with Vietnam were shorter and smaller in scale (R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768–69; Glaser and Billingsley 2011, 28; Sutter and Huang 2011, 72). Also, the joint announcement made by the U.S. and Vietnam emphasised that these exercises did not include live-fire exercises (R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768–69). China therefore assessed that a disruption in Sino-U.S. relations resulting from a stronger and more direct interference into the South China Sea disputes would not serve U.S. interests.

On the other hand, the Chinese were deeply concerned about the expansion of U.S. involvement in the disputes as well as the closer relationship between the U.S. and its southern neighbor – Vietnam. Beijing's unease was manifested by statements and warnings from high-ranking officials. On 22 June, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai urged the U.S. to leave the South China Sea dispute to the claimant states and added that U.S. involvement may make the situation worse. He warned that "the individual countries are actually playing with fire and I hope the fire will not be drawn to the U.S." (Durfee 2011; E. Wong 2011a). This was seen as China's most direct warning to Washington during the tensions of May and June 2011 (Durfee 2011).

China concluded that by demanding freedom of navigation, holding a series of military exercises with parties involved in the South China Sea disputes, and making a high-profile declaration that it was willing to promote multilateral negotiations on the South China Sea issue, the U.S. not only emboldened Vietnam but signalled a greater involvement in the South China Sea (China Daily 2011). Despite the limited nature of the naval exchanges between Vietnam and the U.S., China acknowledged that the significance of these exchanges lay in the fact that they marked one of the first between the two countries as part of a rapidly evolving relationship (Torode 2011b). The evolving strategic relationship between Hanoi and Washington was of particular concern. PLA officials warned that Hanoi was "internationalising" the issue, playing into the hands of the U.S. also calling for a negotiated regional solution (Torode 2011a). Du Jifeng commented that by calling for multilateral talks and holding joint exercises with Hanoi, the U.S. stepped in the dispute

in the South China Sea. Thus, China faced diplomatic difficulties in handling the row (Ng 2011). Taking a similar position, Yu Wanli, of the School of International Relations at Peking University, assessed that while the U.S. used these conflicts to accelerate the pace of its return to Asia, some countries were trying to win over the U.S. to get benefits in the territorial disputes, thereby creating a dangerous situation for China (Dongfang Zaobao 2011). Yang Xiyu, a senior fellow at the Foreign Ministry think-tank Institute of International Studies, also expressed concerns over the U.S.' policy. He indicated that "the U.S. has abandoned its policy stance of 'keeping a low profile' in its South China Sea policy". Yang further points out that "[w]hat concerns us most is whether the U.S. will 'choose sides' in the South China Sea dispute. The U.S. has so far maintained a position of 'not choosing sides'. We must make every effort to ensure that the U.S. does not change this..." (Zhongguo Jingji Wang 2011). After a show of force from both sides and the U.S.' more direct involvement in the South China Sea issues, even China's most hawkish newspaper, *Global Times*, published an editorial on 14 June suggesting that China "should not feud with small countries, and must not divert its vigilance towards the U.S. to smaller nations. It must not rashly have conflicts with any country[...]" (Huanqiu 2011a). Another editorial on 21 June also spoke favourably of a cautious handling towards the U.S. The editorial notes that "the U.S. may add some uncertainty in the South China Sea. China will handle this carefully, and is not likely to engage in a direct confrontation with the U.S.[...]" (Global Times 2011c, 11). Hence, the risk of further U.S. involvement in the South China Sea disputes caused China to exercise caution and restraint in its maritime coercive diplomacy and make subtle adjustments to the tactics used in the two cable-cutting incidents in 2011.

5.4.3. The asymmetry of power

Despite significant investments into modernising its military capabilities, the Vietnamese can by no means narrow the military capability gap between them and China. In 2010, China surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest economy behind the U.S., and China's defence budget has been growing accordingly. In March 2011, China announced an increase in the defence budget of 91.5 billion USD from 81.3 billion USD from 2010 (Blasko 2011, 4; Richburg 2012). Beginning in 2010, China conducted a series of major naval exercises in the South China Sea involving submarines, destroyers, and aircraft with advanced communications and surveillance, which were far superior to the maritime forces available to the other littoral states of the South China Sea (Yahuda 2013, 452; IISS 2011, 2; USCC 2011, 170). An amphibious assault exercise in November 2010 demonstrated the PLAN's capabilities in seizing islands and projecting military power beyond mainland shores (USCC 2011, 170). Also, as mentioned earlier, in June 2011 alone the PLAN conducted six major naval exercises. Michael Yahuda commented that "whether or not such exercises were designed to intimidate other claimants, they were displays of superior power" (Yahuda 2013, 452). At the same time as the cable cuttings took place, the PLAN was making little effort to disguise its plans to launch its first aircraft carrier – the first step towards building an operating carrier group (Buckley 2011).

This asymmetry in military capabilities combined with the asymmetry of motivation in terms of China's strategic interests in the region proved to be effective in deterring Vietnam from seeking closer ties with the U.S. at the expense of China's interests. While China employed the civilian law enforcement forces to deter Vietnam from conducting further explorations, China resorted to PLA forces to deter Vietnam from making efforts to get the U.S. involved in the disputes. It appears that adding military weight to its message contributed to the effectiveness of

Chinese coercive strategy. Although the asymmetry of military capabilities does not guarantee a successful outcome in all cases, China exploited this advantage by combining it with other factors to achieve implicitly stated foreign policy goals.

5.5. Analytical summary

Supported by increased capabilities, particularly in law enforcement, China exercised maritime coercive diplomacy against Vietnam in May and June 2011 by cutting the cables of two Vietnamese oil survey ships: *Binh Minh 02* and *Viking II*. China's coercive diplomacy took place deep inside Vietnam's claimed EEZ and involved Chinese government vessels to deter Vietnam from what China considered to be illegal oil exploration activities and to compel acceptance of joint development to get access to natural resources in the South China Sea. The strategy of coercive diplomacy took the "try-and-see approach", in which China took actions and waited to see if Vietnam complied with its demands. After the first incident in May, Vietnam resumed its oil and gas surveys. Chinese vessels engaged in the second incident in June with some subtle changes in tactics, thereby continuing to pressurise Vietnam into ceasing its exploration activities while avoiding direct confrontation. To put additional pressure on Vietnam, China applied a firm approach in the diplomatic sphere by blaming Vietnam for infringing on China's sovereignty and maritime interests, whilst allowing the media to verbally attack Vietnam.

However, China's coercive diplomacy was unsuccessful. Vietnam's survey ships continued to conduct surveys in the same locations where the incidents took place. Vietnam did not halt its exploration activities within its EEZ, nor did it engage in any joint development with the Chinese afterwards. The explanation for the ineffectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy incorporates two main variables: the asymmetry of motivation between Vietnam and China in the dispute over natural resources within Vietnam's EEZ, and the involvement and reaction of the U.S. As George and Simons argue, the likelihood is increased that coercive diplomacy will be successful, if what is at stake creates an asymmetry of motivation that favours the coercing state. The relative strength of motivation in confrontations reflects the underlying balance of interests (George 1994b, 124; George and Simons 1994a, 281). In this case, the asymmetry of motivation was in Vietnam's favour. Beijing demanded that Hanoi stop its oil exploration activities within the latter's EEZ, as recognised by international law. Such demand engaged Vietnam's core economic interests and its sovereign rights but did not reflect the urgent and vital interests of China. At the same time, China did not offer a 'carrot' to reduce Vietnam's motivation to resist the demands. In addition, the U.S. continued to wade deeper into the South China Sea issue in 2011. Risks associated with the U.S.' involvement caused China to restrain and adjust its tactics in handling the incidents. Therefore, both the asymmetry of motivation and the prospect of greater U.S. involvement limited the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy against Vietnam in these episodes.

Nevertheless, the combination of China's favourable asymmetry of motivation in respect to overall strategic interests in the region and the imbalance of military capabilities between China and Vietnam helped China to achieve the unstated objective of getting Vietnam to maintain the balance between the U.S. and China. As a small state having no desire to disrupt its overall relationship with China, Vietnam took the initiative to de-escalate the tensions.

Finally, the cable-cutting incidents do not demonstrate the importance of domestic factors, including coordination problems and public opinion, on the outcome of coercive diplomacy. By the time of the two incidents in 2011, numerous Chinese government actors were involved in the South China Sea issue. Besides Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local governments, there were five entities responsible for maritime law enforcement, namely the CMS under the SOA, the FLEC under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Maritime Police under the control of the Ministry of Public Security, the Maritime Safety Administration under the Ministry of Transport, and the anti-smuggling police under the General Administration of Customs. CMS and FLEC were the two largest law enforcement forces responsible for all of China's claimed maritime territory (ICG 2012a, 8). In principle, the CMS defended Chinese maritime rights and interests in territorial waters, contiguous zones, and broad sea areas including the EEZ, while the FLEC's main duties included safeguarding fishing vessels as well as land features, rocks and reefs claimed by China, and preventing foreign vessels from fishing in the claimed regions, and where necessary, expelling them (ICG 2012a, 8; Masuda 2014, 66–67). However, there are reasons to doubt that there was a lack of coordination between these agencies in May and June 2011 incidents. First, the repetition of this kind of incident itself suggests the actions at least did not strongly contradict the intent of the relevant central party authorities in Beijing (Chubb 2016, 235). Second, at the 2011 Shangri-La Dialogue, Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie told his Vietnamese counterpart that the PLA was not aware of the cable-cutting. It was done by civilian. According to You Ji's (2014) source, however, the order came from the PLAN's Paracels Surveillance District after consultation with superiors. The reason cited was for the safety of the Chinese crew, rather than aggression.³⁷ However, regardless of the reason, the effort is state-supported. Therefore, there is no evidence that the number of actors and China's complicated bureaucratic structure constrained the execution and the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. Regarding public opinion, in the case, in both China and Vietnam, public opinion was used as a tool to serve foreign policy goals. Either in the form of nationalist editorials and commentaries or by demonstration and protests, public opinion was exploited to express resolve or displeasure to put pressure on the other side. As the dispute was related to territorial and sovereignty issues, neither of the two countries lacked the support from the public to hard-line policies. However, public opinion had a limited role. The unsuccessful efforts of China to deter Vietnam from conducting oil exploration resulted from other factors rather than the support of public opinion to Hanoi's resistance. Once Hanoi decided to de-escalate tensions, they halted using this political card.

³⁷ See footnote 79 in (Ji 2014, 251)

Chapter 6

The Scarborough Shoal stand-off, 2012

This chapter examines the maritime coercive diplomacy employed by the PRC in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off with the Philippines in 2012. The chapter first provides some background on the dispute between China and the Philippines over Scarborough Shoal and then investigates China's initial objectives. China's exercise of coercive diplomacy strategy against the Philippines in three phases of the stand-off and its extending objectives are then examined in detail in the third section of the chapter. After evaluating the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy, the chapter provides an explanation by analysing the asymmetry of motivation and power between the Philippines and China, the weakness of the U.S. during the stand-off, and domestic factors.

6.1. Background

Scarborough Shoal is known as Bajo de Masinloc to Filipinos and Huangyan Island to the Chinese. It is a triangular-shaped chain of reefs and rocks that encircles a 150-km² lagoon rich in fisheries and other marine life, which have been exploited by both Chinese and Philippine fishing vessels for decades (Beckman 2012, 1).³⁸ The Shoal lies approximately 124 nautical miles from the Philippine province of Zambales, on the main Philippine island of Luzon, and more than 540 nautical miles from China's Hainan Province (Regalado 2012; USCC 2012, 231). Marked by five rocks, some of which project three metres above the water at high tide (Thayer 2012d; PHDFA 2012), Scarborough is thus considered to be the only reef permanently above the sea's surface out of all the shoals and sea-mountains in the vast central part of the South China Sea (Koda 2014, 86).

The Shoal is claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines as an integral part of their national territory. China premises their claims on being the first to discover the Shoal in the 13th century (Hongyun Li and Li 2012; J. Gao 2012). Further, China also claims that Scarborough Shoal or Huangyan Island is a part of what China calls the Zhongsha Islands located inside China's nine-dash line to which it has historic claims to sovereignty (Beckman 2012, 2). The Philippines, on the other hand, claims Scarborough Shoal on the basis of effective occupation and effective jurisdiction since its independence in 1946. It argues that Philippine flags have been erected, that a small lighthouse was built and was in operation on one of the islets in the shoal in 1965, and that it has conducted research and surveys in the waters surrounding the Shoal (Beckman 2012, 1–2; Rosen 2014, 11). The Philippines' official position also notes that Scarborough Shoal was used as an impact range by Philippine and U.S. Naval Forces for defence purposes (PHDFA 2012).

Beside the questions of sovereignty, the Philippines further asserts that, under UNCLOS, the waters surrounding Scarborough Shoal lie within its 200-nautical-mile EEZ, as measured from its main archipelago, which gives the Philippines sovereign rights to explore, exploit, conserve, and manage the resources in these waters (PHDFA 2012).

Tensions between Beijing and Manila in the South China Sea flared up in the mid-1990s

³⁸ According to a Chinese source, the reef is the largest atoll in the South China Sea (S. Chen 1987, 181, 345; Zou 1999a, 71).

when China used military coercion to seize Mischief Reef (Bonnet 2012, 3; Zou 1999a, 71). The first real confrontation over Scarborough Shoal followed in April 1997. Two Chinese boats, which China claimed were participating in an international amateur radio group activity, planted Chinese flags and erected markers at the Shoal (*Inquirer* 2012e). A Philippine Navy ship drove them away and destroyed the markers. In the same incident, 21 Chinese fishermen were arrested and charged with illegal fishing, but the case was dismissed by the local court (De Castro 2015b, 85). Over the next four years, Philippine Navy ships continued to apprehend Chinese fishermen in a number of occasions.³⁹ In one case in 1999, a Chinese trawler was claimed to be rammed by a Philippine Navy patrol ship before it sank (*Inquirer* 2012e). After subsiding for most of the 2000s, the South China Sea dispute, including the one over Scarborough Shoal, has become actively contested since 2009, when Manila revised its baselines and brought them into line with UNCLOS, applying the 'regime of islands' to its claimed islands, including Scarborough Shoal and the Kalayaan Island Group (which covers most of the Spratlys Islands) (Schofield 2016, 140). The dispute culminated in the tense stand-off in 2012.

On 8 April 2012, after a Philippine Navy surveillance plane spotted several Chinese fishing boats in the lagoon at Scarborough Shoal (*The Guardian* 2012), the Philippines' largest warship – *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* – was dispatched from its homeport of Palawan to intercept the fishing boats (De Castro 2015a, 118). Two Chinese CMS vessels – *Haijian 75* and *Haijian 84* – placed themselves between the Chinese fishing boats and the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* frigate, preventing the Philippine Navy from making any arrests of the Chinese fishermen or confiscating the catch, and leading to the tensest stand-off since the late 1990s. The situation escalated when the two sides continued to send vessels to the Shoal. The stand-off, which lasted for two months, strained Sino-Philippine bilateral relations and ended when China ultimately took de facto control of Scarborough Shoal.

6.2. China's initial objectives

Some argue that the trigger for the confrontation was the Philippines' decision to dispatch the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* – the Philippines' largest naval vessel – to investigate the Chinese fishing activities (Chubb 2016, 284). In response to the Philippines' attempt to apprehend Chinese fishermen, Chinese government vessels intervened in April 2012. Thus, the first objective of China's maritime coercive diplomacy was to stop the Philippines from arresting Chinese fishermen and confiscating their catch.

A broader objective, however, was to compel the Philippines to accept the activities of Chinese fishermen, and a Chinese presence at the Shoal. In 2009, China was the biggest exporter of aquatic products in the world (H. Zhang 2012, 2–3). China's per capita consumption of aquatic products increased fivefold between 1970 and 2010 (H. Zhang 2012, 5). China's fishing sector is

³⁹ According to the Philippines, from May 1997 to March 1998, Philippine law enforcement officials arrested 72 Chinese fishermen in the area. In 2002 alone, Manila detained 120 Chinese fishermen at the shoal. See: (USCC 2012, 233; Green et al. 2017, 97). The Chinese Fishery Department, under the Ministry of Agriculture, claimed that four Chinese fishing boats were intercepted by the Philippine navy in the waters around the island from January to March in 1998 and 51 fishermen on board were detained for about six months. From 2000 to 2011, at least 32 fishing ships, with 439 fishermen on board, were chased, robbed or detained by the Philippine navy. See: (Xinhua 2012)

thus critically important to the national economy, local economic development as well as national food security (H. Zhang 2012, 4). However, as domestic demand and exports rise, the fish stocks in China's coastal waters are declining. As a result, Chinese fleets have been pushed further into outer ocean. The Guangdong and Hainan governments have encouraged, and in some cases forced, fishing companies and boat owners to fish further into offshore waters, including the disputed waters around Scarborough Shoal (*Guoji Xianqu Daobao* 2011; *Guangzhou Ribao* 2011; H. Zhang 2012, 8; ICG 2012a, 23). Therefore, the valuable fish stocks of the Shoal may have contributed to the shift in China's behaviour. However, the Chinese are more concerned about guaranteeing access for their fishing boats and increasing their presence in the waters around the Shoal. At a Hainan Province Maritime Affairs Conference in October 2012, then-SOA Director Liu Cigui clearly stated "[w]e must pursue development and exploitation of marine resources in order to manifest China's concrete presence in the South China Sea and manifest China's sovereignty over the islands of the South China Sea and their adjacent waters" (Tao and Deng 2012; Martinson 2018, 44). A commander of a Border Defence Force unit based in Tanmen, Hainan said "[w]e should thank these fishermen, for if they weren't fishing at Scarborough Shoal or the Spratlys, who could prove that these places are ours?" (Zeng 2012; Martinson 2018, 45). As Andrew Chubb (2016, 286) notes, Beijing has a long-held belief in the value of fishing activities in intelligence gathering and providing an "embodying presence". Therefore, any resource exploitation activities were intertwined with the strategic aims of taking control over a strategically important sea area, and "establishing a legal justification for doing so" (Chubb 2016, 286).

Thus, from the outset of the stand-off, China employed coercive diplomacy to achieve two main initial objectives: stopping the Philippines from arresting Chinese fishermen and deterring them from intervening in future activities of Chinese fishing boats or government vessels, thereby accepting a Chinese presence at the Shoal.

6.3. China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off

China's employment of maritime coercion during the stand-off against the Philippines can be divided into three phases. The first phase started from the dispatch of two Chinese ships – *Haijian 75* and *84* – to the Shoal in April 2012 and ended later that month before the meeting of top defence and foreign affair officials from the U.S. and the Philippines. The second phase was the May 2012 escalation. The last phase ran from early June to China's de facto control over the Shoal. The following section examines China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy and analyses the extent to which China achieved its objectives.

6.3.1. The first phase: April stand-off

On 8 April 2012, after spotting several Chinese fishing boats at Scarborough Shoal, the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* was sent into the Shoal (De Castro 2015a, 118). Arriving on the morning of 10 April, the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* anchored outside the entrance to the lagoon and dispatched a boarding team of armed Filipino sailors on dinghies to inspect the Chinese fishing boats. Large amounts of coral, giant calms and live sharks, which were all protected under the Philippines' anti-poaching law, were found, as shown by photos released by the Philippine military (AP 2012). The team then disembarked. During this time, Chinese fishing boats sent out emergency signals through the Beidou navigation system installed in the boats. According to a May article by Han Yong and Guan Xiangdong (2012) in *China Newsweek*, as soon as the signal for help was received, *Haijian 75* and *84* reported the incident to the South China Sea Marine Surveillance Corps, which

then reported to the CMS Headquarter. The incident was then reported to the SOA, and finally to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly brought the incident to the attention of the top leadership (Han and Guan 2012). A temporary "command post" was set up at the CMS Headquarter, with a "forward command post" at the South China Sea Marine Surveillance Corps, to deal with the crisis. Soon after approval from the top leaders was given via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and *Haijian 75* and *84* were dispatched to Scarborough Shoal (Han and Guan 2012). As Filipino personnel were preparing to board again to conduct arrests and confiscate the ships, the two 1,500-ton CMS vessels *Haijian 75* and *84* arrived at the Shoal. They interposed themselves between the Chinese fishing boats and the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* frigate to prevent the Philippine Navy's apprehension of the Chinese fishermen and the seizure of their catch.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila declared that the two CMS ships were tasked with "safeguard[ing] Chinese national maritime rights and interests" (Green et al. 2017, 102). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin announced in a statement on 11 April that the Philippines' attempt to carry out law enforcement activities had violated China's sovereignty (FMPRC 2012a). Accusing the Philippines Navy ship of "illegally entering Chinese waters", China warned the Philippines "not to complicate and escalate the situation" and urged the Philippines to immediately leave the area, which forms "an integral part of the Chinese territory" (Lee-Brago 2012; FMPRC 2012a). According to Filipino officials, China had never before issued such stern warnings about the Shoal being Chinese territory (Morris 2017, 101–2). On the next morning of 11 April, an unarmed CMS *Harbin Y-12 II* patrol aircraft conducted a reconnaissance flight over Scarborough Shoal.⁴⁰

On 12 April, President of the Philippines Benigno Aquino III decided to withdraw the warship and replaced it with the *BRP Pampanga* (SARV 003) – a 540-ton Coast Guard search and rescue vessel. By the time *BRP Pampanga* replaced *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*, instead of reciprocating to reduce tensions, China sent *Yuzheng 303* – a 1,000-ton FLEC patrol ship with a deck-mounted gun – to Scarborough Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 102; Jamandre 2012). At that point, the Philippine Coast Guard was outnumbered three to one by Chinese vessels (Morris 2017, 102). One day later, on 13 April, *Haijian 75* and *Yuzheng 303* withdrew, escorting the fishermen, and leaving only *Haijian 84* at the Shoal. China considered this to be a de-escalating move from China side and insisted that the Philippines withdraw its last ship at the Shoal first to reciprocate (Green et al. 2017, 103). The Philippines refused to withdraw its only Coast Guards ship from Scarborough Shoal, and diplomatic talks broke down.

To compel the Philippines to withdraw its ship from the Shoal, Chinese *Haijian 75* was re-dispatched and the CMS *Harbin Y-12* again conducted reconnaissance flights over Scarborough Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 104). A few days later, a CMS ship was reported to have harassed a Philippine ship – *MV Sarangani* – commissioned by the National Museum to conduct archaeological surveys of a wreck near Scarborough Shoal and ordered it to leave the area on the grounds that it was engaged in "illegal salvage archaeology", since the wreck belonged to China (Hayton 2014, 27; De Castro 2013, 6; Page 2013). Although the Philippines filed two diplomatic protests over the harassment of *MV Sarangani* (Green et al. 2017, 105), it eventually withdrew the

⁴⁰ This aircraft probably flew from a base in Guangzhou to Woody Island in the Paracel Islands, refueled, and flew again to Scarborough Shoal (*GMA News Online* 2012a; Green et al. 2017, 101).

research boat amidst the escalating tension (De Castro 2015a, 119).

On 16 April, the Philippines sent another Coast Guard ship - the *BRP EDSA II* – to replace *BRP Pampanga*. Manila, however, realised that it would be unable to compete with China, as most of the time its vessels were outnumbered in the area. The Philippines then added another prong to its strategy by announcing its intention to bring the Scarborough Shoal dispute to international arbitration. The Chinese Foreign Ministry immediately rejected the proposal and declared that "there is no such issue of taking the dispute to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea". Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying summoned Philippine chargé d'affaires on 18 April – the second time within the week following the stand-off – to urge the Philippines to "withdraw its vessels", "respect China's territorial sovereignty" and "refrain from actions that may escalate the situation" (FMPRC 2012b; AFP 2012a). To exert more pressure on the Philippines, the Chinese Fisheries Administration Bureau of the South China Sea Area dispatched the 2,500-ton *Yuzheng 310* from Guangzhou city, Guangdong province (*The China Times* 2012), which arrived at the Shoal on 20 April. *Yuzheng 310* is the largest and most advanced patrol vessel, which is equipped with machine guns, light cannons and electronic sensors, as well as light helicopters (Hookway 2012; Green et al. 2017, 106). Along with *Yuzheng 310*, between three to ten fishing boats were also reported to have returned to the Shoal (*Inquirer* 2012a).

The same tactic as when China withdrew *Haijian 75* and *Yuzheng 303* was then re-applied. On 23 April, as spokesman of Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, Zhang Hua, announced that China was de-escalating the situation in Scarborough Shoal by withdrawing *Yuzheng 310* and *Haijian 84*, and that "China is ready to settle this incident through friendly diplomatic consultations" (Xinhua 2012b). However, China also stated that one maritime surveillance ship remained at Scarborough Shoal for law enforcement missions (Xinhua 2012b). While China considered the withdrawal of two vessels as a de-escalation of hostilities, the Filipino officials and top diplomats expressed doubts (J. E. Esplanada 2012; *Inquirer* 2012c). This lack of trust derived from either military sources reporting Chinese vessels' movements in the area at the time (*Inquirer* 2012c; Avendaño and Yap 2012),⁴¹ or the unpleasant surprise caused by the return of Chinese vessels to the Shoal and the harassment of the Philippine archaeological vessel shortly after announcing the de-escalation attempt by pulling out two Chinese vessels from Scarborough just a week earlier (Esmaquel 2012b). Also, the Philippines might believe that a full ceasing of the stand-off could only be reached with the full removal of Chinese vessels (Scanlan 2012). Regardless of the reason, as noted by Walter Lohman (2012), there is a very basic calculation involved here: the first to leave the Shoal will be perceived as ceding sovereignty. In other words, fully vacating the area would be considered a sign of defeat (Scanlan 2012). Therefore, the Philippines did not withdraw the *BRP Pampanga*, but deployed a ship from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to the Shoal on 23 April (Avendaño and Yap 2012), over which Beijing made "solemn representations" to Manila and urged the Philippines to "take positive steps [to restore peace and harmony]" at Scarborough Shoal (Xinhua 2012c).

By the end of April, negotiations aimed at diffusing the stand-off were going nowhere. The Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs accused the PRC's Embassy in Manila of relaying "inaccurate" information to Beijing. Manila then officially sought direct U.S. support over the

⁴¹ Philippine authorities reported seeing at least two Chinese government vessels and five fishing boats in the area. See: (Esmaquel 2012c; 2012a)

stand-off (Green et al. 2017, 109; Kaiman 2012). Beijing viewed the prolonged absence of a Philippine Ambassador to China as an indication of the lack of motivation on the part of the Philippines to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis (ICG 2012b, 9).⁴² On the one hand, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Liu Weimin, warned the Philippines on 26 April to "refrain from any more actions that will complicate, amplify or internationalise the situation" and demanded Manila not to "draw other countries in or ask them to choose side" (FMPRC 2012c). China's National Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng, on the other hand, stated in a statement posted on Beijing's government web portal on the same day that Chinese armed forces would "make joint efforts with fishery and maritime supervision agencies" in safeguarding China's marine rights and interests (Xinhua 2012d). This statement was the first official remark from the armed forces since the stand-off began (Y. Zhang 2012a). Made only three days after China declared its de-escalation by withdrawing two ships, this statement was seen as one of its most provocative (Del Callar and Rosales 2012). *Yuzheng 310* returned to the Shoal on 28 April and engaged in what the Philippines described as the "bullying" of its vessels. According to the Philippine authorities, as the *BRP EDSA II* was relieving the *BRP Pampanga*, *Yuzheng 310* accelerated and then suddenly veered away, generating a two-metre wave that struck two Philippine vessels (Pazzibugan 2012). Beijing called this a "sheer subjective assumption" made by Manila and stated that *Yuzheng 310* was patrolling waters off the coast of Scarborough in accordance with the law (Xinhua 2012e). The next day, *Haijian 75* was also sent back to the Shoal, and at the end of April, China dispatched more vessels to the area.

6.3.2. The second phase: May escalation and China's additional objectives

While refusing to withdraw all its vessels from the Shoal, the Philippines appeared to be serious in its intention to submit its maritime disputes with China to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). On 3 May, the Philippines' Foreign Secretary, Albert Del Rosario, declared that the Department of Foreign Affairs was "making the necessary preparations" for the presentation of the dispute to ITLOS (J. E. Esplanada and Burgonio 2012). In addition, in early May, the Philippines took another move by renaming Scarborough Shoal as Panatag Shoal (Esmaguél 2012d). Therefore, aside from the initial objectives of deterring the Philippines from intervening in Chinese fishing activities and compelling Manila to accept China's claims, as well as its presence at the Shoal, China's coercive diplomacy also compelled the Philippine leadership to change what Beijing perceived to be provocative behaviours, namely in seeking international arbitration and inflaming public opinion against China (D. Wang 2012).

From late April to the end of May, China resorted to a variety of measures to pressure the Philippines. Pressure was increased on Manila all directions, ranging from cyber space and the media, the economic arena to confrontations on the ground and military-related activities. As vessels from the two countries remained locked in the stand-off, tensions spilled over into the cyber space. On 21 April, the official website of the University of the Philippines was attacked by Chinese hackers. The homepage was defaced with a map and a caption reading "[w]e come from China! Huangyan Island is Ours!" (*Inquirer* 2012b). On 25 April, the Philippines reported that

⁴² During the first two phases of the stand-off, the Philippines lacked an Ambassador to the PRC due to the Commission on Appointments' failure to confirm President's Aquino's nomination of businessman Domingo Lee for the post. In late April, Lee withdrew his nomination. It was not until 30 May that Sonia Brady was approved as the Philippines' Ambassador to China (Cheng 2012; Tan 2012; ICG 2012b, 9 (note 80)).

hackers posted a Chinese flag on the website of the Philippines' Department of Budget and Management in two attacks. Before this, the presidential website, *Official Gazette*, was also attacked by networks traced to China (J. E. Esplanada and Avendaño 2012). Filipino hackers fought back by vandalizing several websites of Chinese government agencies, universities, and the news media (Green et al. 2017, 107). The Philippines' government promptly censured the illegal behaviours of both groups. China, on the other hand, neither condoned nor condemned the hacking activities (Green et al. 2017, 107). A number of other Philippine homepages, including that of the official newspaper the *Philippine Star*, and the *Philippines News Agency*, were also reported to have been replaced with images of the Chinese flag and the Scarborough Shoal in early May (*Inquirer* 2012d; *GMA News Online* 2012b).

During the stand-off, Chinese state media adopted a hyper-nationalist tone (Lohman 2012, 1), as state-controlled news sources routinely ran articles suggesting open conflict would be a viable and easy solution (Cruz 2015, 31). On 22 April 2012, the *Global Times*, urged the Chinese government to engage the Philippines in a small-scale war to end the stalemate once and for all. It stated that "once war erupts, China must take resolute action and deliver a clear message to the outside world that it does not want a war, but definitely has no fear of it" (J. E. Esplanada, Avendaño, and Yap 2012). In an essay published on 27 April 2012 and entitled *Troubled Waters Call for Decisive Action*, Major General Luo Yuan (2012) of the PLA Academy of Military Sciences wrote that "it is incorrect to assume that China will completely rule out military action in any event during this 'period of strategic opportunity'" and that "[t]he assumption that China will abandon the notion of war at all costs due to its 'peaceful rise' philosophy is also incorrect". He also suggested that China should take the opportunity of the deadlock to "strengthen its claims to Huangyan Island by raising the Chinese flag or establishing a military or fishing base" and that "it is important that China demonstrates its determination to safeguard its national sovereignty and security" (Luo 2012). Another commentary in the state-run newspaper, *China Daily*, warned the Philippines that "many in China are beginning to lose patience as the face-off continues into its third week and some are calling for more resolute moves to punish Manila and defend the country's maritime territory" and that "[w]hether tensions over the stand-off at the Huangyan Island (Scarborough Shoal) escalate further depends to a large extent on how Manila acts next. If Manila continues to ignore this country's repeated offer of and appeal for peaceful dialogue, it should not count on eternal Chinese restraint" (*China Daily* 2012). On 2 May, the *Global Times* published the results of a nationwide survey about Chinese public opinion regarding the use of military means in response to "provocations" and "invasion" of other regional states in the South China Sea. The survey found that nearly 80 percent were supportive (*Huanqiu* 2012a). The threatening rhetoric of the government-controlled media continued throughout the first half of May. The *People's Liberation Army Daily*, the newspaper of the Chinese Army, ran a tough editorial on 10 May entitled *Never Expect to Take Away Half an Inch of China's Territory*, stating that China would not tolerate any country "snatch[ing] the sovereignty over Huangyan Island". According to the editorial, "[n]ot only the Chinese government will not agree, neither will the Chinese people, and the Chinese Army will disagree even more" (PLA Daily 2012; Perlez 2012). Using the national media to spread rumours of war preparation against the Philippines served China's interests in two ways (Bonnet 2012, 5). Firstly, hardline remarks underlined China's determination to protect its interests from what it perceived as foreign encroachment (Sutter and Huang 2012a, 74). Secondly, as Andrew Chubb notes, by amplifying the possibility of otherwise irrational Chinese military action and inevitable escalation should Beijing's actions at the Shoal be interfered with, these

remarks contributed to deterring the Philippines (Chubb 2013, 12). In other words, they appear to have been designed not to provoke military conflict, but rather to help ensure China achieved its objective of persuading the Philippines to desist from opposing its control over Scarborough Shoal and accept the new status quo while avoiding military conflict (Chubb 2013, 14).

After the Philippines maintained its intentions to take the dispute to the international tribunal, numerous documents and publications justifying China's sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal were published and re-posted on the websites of the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Chinese Embassy in Manila. Some documents, such as *Some Basic Facts on China's Sovereignty over Huangyan Island*, *Ten Questions Regarding Huangyan Island* and *Who Owns the Sovereignty Over the Huangyan Island*, which was written by two law experts at Peking University, focused on the historical and legal basis of China's claims by detailing China's discovery and administration of the area (Xinhua 2012a; NISCSS 2012; Hongyun Li and Li 2012). Other writings argued that the Philippines lacked the legal ground to take the case to the Tribunal (Yi 2012) and the Tribunal had no the jurisdiction over disputes concerning island sovereignty (Yi 2012; Hui 2012). Chinese experts also concluded that China had the right to decide on which way to use to settle disputes (Hui 2012; Yi 2012). These publications formed another element of China's propaganda to make the case for its claims on Scarborough Shoal as well as a pre-emption of the Philippines' efforts to internationalise the dispute by using legal tools.

Incensed by Manila's unwillingness to withdraw from the Shoal, China exerted economic pressure on the Philippines (Glaser 2012). The punitive measures ranged from more stringent checks on Philippine tropical fruits to a travel warning for Chinese citizens traveling to the Philippines. In early May, it was reported that China impounded Philippine bananas on the grounds that the bananas failed quarantine tests (Green et al. 2017, 111). According to the Philippines' Bureau of Plant Industry, the row over Philippine fruit exports started as early as 5 March when Chinese authorities informed the Philippines of insect problems in Philippine banana exports to China (*GMA News Online* 2012c; Higgins 2012). However, the initial warning did not lead to general curbs on imports (Higgins 2012). Only after the stand-off began, did China apply a stricter inspection regulation on Philippine bananas (*GMA News Online* 2012c). China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine "sharply escalated the health issue", stating in a letter to the Philippines' Department of Agriculture that it had found 104 types of harmful organisms in Philippines imports (Higgins 2012). China denied mixing politics and business (Higgins 2012); however, these complaints from Chinese quarantine authorities about bugs in Philippine fruit exports puzzled Filipino officials because they had not received any similar complaints from other countries importing the same products (*GMA News Online* 2012d). In mid-May, the Chinese quarantine of Philippine fruit imports continued to escalate and was extended to other fruits from the Philippines, including papayas, mangoes and pineapples (*GMA News Online* 2012d). By 11 May, 1,500 containers of bananas from the Philippines were being held in various Chinese ports for inspection (*Inquirer* 2012f). At the same time, the Chinese Embassy warned of a planned anti-China protest in Manila and issued a safety alert for all Chinese citizens in the country (*Reuters* 2012b; *BBC* 2012a; *Reuters* 2012a). China's National Tourism Administration forced all travel agents to suspend travel to the Philippines and cited anti-China protests and "safety concerns" as the reasons behind its order (*CNN* 2012). This resulted in abrupt cancellations of 80 scheduled Chinese tour group and chartered flights to the Philippines (USCC 2012, 231). Major Chinese travel agencies, such as CYTS Tours, Ctrip.com, and Caissa International Travel Service, halted all tours to the Philippines indefinitely, also refusing to accept new bookings (Cuneta and

Hookway 2012; *CNN* 2012; *BBC* 2012b). Since 16 May, no Chinese tourist group had visited the Philippines (Amer and Li 2014, 38). As travel agencies cancelled trips and tourist numbers shrank, China Southern Airlines, one of the three largest Chinese airlines, reduced the number of flights between China's Guangzhou and Manila from two to a single flight on certain days (Xinhua 2012h). These restrictions were particularly damaging because China is the third largest trading partner of the Philippines (Cuneta and Hookway 2012). In particular, 70 percent of Philippine bananas are exported to China, and China is also the fourth largest source of international tourists to the Philippines. Key industries of the Philippines' economy were badly hit (He 2016, 119). It was reported that losses from banana exports in May were approximately 34 million USD and the cost to the tourism industry was nearly one million USD (Thayer 2012e; He 2016, 119).

Beijing has never admitted that these punitive measures related to the territorial disputes in Scarborough Shoal. Also, some analysts argue that it is not obvious whether the restriction was passed down from the central government, or the initiative was developed on the local level or individual firms (Lim 2017, 153). Kheng Lim (2017, 154) and Angela Poh (2017, 150–51) argue that while these caused real economic damage to some sectors, these controls were restricted to a small sector of Philippine exports to China. They note that Philippine exports to China actually rose steadily during the tensions. However, Tong Xiaolong, China's Ambassador to the ASEAN, hinted at a linkage between Chinese punitive economic measures and the dispute over Scarborough (Lai 2018, 179), saying that "if the Huangyan Island situation keeps developing, bilateral ties, including the trade relationship, will surely be affected" (Jiabao Li 2012). The quarantine agency urged the local authorities to increase examinations for harmful organisms (Perlez 2012; Jiabao Li 2012). It was also reported that local authorities were told to send samples containing living species to a laboratory for further testing (Jiabao Li 2012). Furthermore, according to Zhao Jianglin, an economic expert at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies within the China Academy of Social Sciences, the move to enhance fruit quality inspections was "convenient and easy to operate" in order to "test the reaction of the Philippines" before economic sanctions were introduced (Jiabao Li 2012), and that it provided a "warning to the Philippines" (Jiabao Li 2012).

On the diplomatic front, Chinese officials ramped up warnings over the dispute with the Philippines. On 7 May 2012, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying summoned Alex Chua, Charge D'affaires of the Philippine Embassy in China for the third time. Fu warned that the Philippines did not realise that it was "making serious mistakes" and was "stepping up efforts to escalate tensions", adding that "it is hard for us to be optimistic about the situation" and urging the Philippines to withdraw its vessels and to never again impede the operations of Chinese fishing vessels or Chinese government vessels. She warned the Philippines not to "misjudge the situation, and not escalate tensions without considering consequences", and advised that China "has also made all preparations to respond to any escalation of the situation by the Philippine side" (FMPRC 2012d). When diplomatic negotiations resumed on 9 May, China re-raised its "requirements" that Chinese public service ships at Scarborough not be disturbed, that Chinese fishing boats be left alone to go about their normal activities, and that the Philippine vessels leave the Shoal (Inquirer 2012g).

Concurrently, China's maritime tactics involved military activities. On 9 May 2012, Japan and Taiwan reported the movements of a flotilla of five Chinese warships – including two guided-missile destroyers, two frigates and one amphibious landing ship – whilst they conducted exercises in the sea midway between Taiwan and the Philippine island of Luzon (McElroy 2012). The flotilla

under the PLAN South China Sea Fleet took part in a three-dimensional landing drill. Rare available information on this exercise revealed that one of the training's objectives was to capture a targeted position through coordination between troops landing from assault boats and commandoes delivered from helicopters (*Naval Today* 2012; CCTV International 2012; USCC 2012, 223). Another exercise also organised in May 2012 involved PLA Air Force units in southern Hainan province. It was reported that the PLAAF units practiced escort missions with *Sukhoi-27* and *Jian-10* jets, jamming aircraft, and bombers (*Want China Times (Taiwan)* 2012; USCC 2012, 223). Amidst the tense stand-off with the Philippines, China showcased its cutting-edge military hardware by staging test flight of its new stealth fighter jet *J-20* on 12 May (Peh Shing Huei 2012). After the U.S. and Russia, China is the third country that has developed a stealth combat aircraft (NTI 2012). The timing of the test flights suggests that the PLA wanted to send a subtle message to the Philippines and influence Manila to re-assess the cost of confronting the PLA over Scarborough Reef (Peh Shing Huei 2012). The targets, however, could also include other ASEAN states having territorial disputes with China, as well as the U.S. (Peh Shing Huei 2012).

Demanding that the Philippines immediately withdraw, China rapidly escalated the dispute by greatly outnumbering the Philippines' vessels (Ratner 2013). As of 2 May, the total number of Chinese vessels involved in the stand-off was 14 vessels including four government and ten fishing ships (Pazzibugan 2012) against only five Philippine vessels, in which there were two government vessels and three fishing boats. China allowed a large number of "utility boats" – dinghies stored aboard larger fishing vessels – to enter the Shoal. Chinese fishermen travelled to Scarborough Shoal in large ships and then sailed small boats to fish in the lagoon (*China Daily Mail* 2013; Green et al. 2017, 114). The number of Chinese vessels at Scarborough Shoal was reported to increase to more than 30 including three big ships, seven fishing vessels and 23 utility boats by 8 May (Inquirer 2012g). The Philippines had only two vessels: the *BRP EDSA* and the *MCS 3001* from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Inquirer 2012g). In mid-May, China announced its annual summer fishing ban in the South China Sea, covering the disputed waters near the Scarborough Shoal and surrounding areas and warned that action would be taken against foreign fishing vessels violating the ban (Thayer 2012e).⁴³ The Philippines refused to recognise the validity of the Chinese ban and issued its own fishing ban covering the Shoal (Thayer 2012e). Despite China's ban, a large number of Chinese fishing boats were still permitted to continue fishing inside the lagoon, as Chinese civilian authorities took no steps to prevent these vessels from fishing (Thayer 2012e). In a 23 May statement, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei admitted that there were 20 Chinese fishing boats operating at the Shoal (Xinhua 2012k), while China's total maritime presence at the Shoal reached a peak of approximately 100 vessels, including 5 government and 76 utility ships during the week of 21 May (Xinhua 2012k; Green et al. 2017, 115). Despite its own ban and China's double standard, Manila, being severely outnumbered, did not take any action against Chinese fishing vessels or send its fishermen back to the Shoal (ICG 2012b, 9–10; Green et al. 2017, 115). By the end of May, the total number of Chinese ship deployed at Scarborough had declined due to the withdrawal of utility boats, but more Chinese government vessels were dispatched to the Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 116). China's continued escalation may be explained by the fact that Manila was still attempting to win international support for its arbitration case. In a statement delivered before the UN General

⁴³ The annual fishing ban, which has been in place since 1999, lasts from May 16 to August 1, covering areas north of the 12th parallel, including Scarborough Shoal but excluding most of the Sparty Islands. See: (Xinhua 2012j).

Assembly on 24 May, Secretary del Rosario called for mediation and other third party mechanisms to end the impasse (Green et al. 2017, 116; Del Callar 2012a).

Dividing ASEAN and isolating the Philippines also formed a part of China's comprehensive approach to coercing the Philippines. To prevent the region from coalescing behind Manila, China moved to isolate the Philippines and drive a wedge between ASEAN countries. Given that a number of regional countries shared China's public position that the Philippines was to blame for instigating the crisis by employing a naval vessel for law enforcement activities, this was relatively easy at the outset (Ratner 2013). In order to influence the Chair of ASEAN at that time – Cambodia – and ASEAN's internal discussions, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Cambodia prior to the opening of the ASEAN summit in early April. Between 28 and 30 May, Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie also made an official visit to Cambodia during the 6th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), which, according to some experts, informally turned the ADMM into the ADMM+1 (T. T. Tran and Nguyen 2013, 99). Liang held "surprise talks" with Southeast Asian defence officials (Sutter and Huang 2012b, 64). While using his four-day visit to solidify bilateral relations with Cambodia, Liang also reassured ASEAN counterparts (Sutter and Huang 2012b, 64), and warned the Philippines in a meeting with his Philippine counterpart – Voltaire Gazmin – on the sideline of the ADMM, that the Philippines should show "discretion in both words and deeds" if it wanted to resolve the impasse peacefully (Y. Zhang 2012b).

6.3.3. The third phase: A fait accompli

In early June, there was a numerical decline in Chinese ships, which mostly came from the withdrawal of utility boats (Green et al. 2017, 116–17). On 4 June, all government ships from both sides – eight Chinese government vessels and two Philippine ships – were kept outside the shoal, along with 30 Chinese trawlers and dinghies inside (Xinhua 2012m; Green et al. 2017, 117). The Philippines' Foreign Affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez indicated this was "the result of evolving negotiations" between the two countries (*GMA News Online* 2012e). On 15 June, President Aquino ordered the two Philippine ships to depart the area. The Philippines claimed that the reason for the pull-out was the safety of the two ships' personnel as a Typhoon Butchoy was heading towards the Philippines (*GMA News Online* 2012f). However, two days later, according to a Palace spokesperson, Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario said there was an arrangement and the Philippines was waiting for China to do the same (*GMA News Online* 2012f). While there was no public announcement of an immediate reciprocal action from China (Tordesillas 2012), on 17 June, China posted on the Chinese Embassy in Manila that another Chinese vessel *Nanghaijiu-115* was sent to Scarborough Shoal waters in order to provide the necessary assistance to Chinese fishermen and fishing boats to pull-out safely in rough sea conditions (FMPRC 2012e). The next day, when asked to comment on Del Rosario's remarks on China's commitment to remove its vessels from the Shoal, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hong Lei, denied such a commitment and urged the Philippines to constrain its words and deeds (Xinhua 2012n).

According to some reports, in early June, Kurt Campbell, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, met with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying and suggested a mutual and simultaneous withdrawal of Chinese and Philippine vessels from Scarborough Shoal. By the end of the meeting, the U.S. side believed that they had reached an agreement for both sides to withdraw (Dyer and Sevastopulo 2014; Ratner 2013). However, while the Philippines' vessels

left the Shoal, China reneged on its prior commitment and left its ships in place.⁴⁴ Other sources reported that Fu Ying told Campbell she would relay the idea of a mutual withdrawal back to senior leaders in Beijing, and that it was unclear whether the U.S. and China had actually reached a deal (Green et al. 2017, 118). Regardless of the versions, it is clear that the Philippines backed down under pressure from the U.S., both in the first withdrawal on 4 June and the second on 15 June. According to Philippine sources, some U.S.-brokered negotiations with China had occurred before the first withdrawal (P. Lee 2016; Green et al. 2017, 117). In recently released email correspondence from June 2012, Jake Sullivan, a top adviser to Secretary Clinton, affirmed the view that the U.S. "[...] put a lot of pressure on the [Philippines] to step back".⁴⁵

On 20 June, President Aquino declared that the Philippines was ready to send boats back to the Shoal if foreign vessels trespassed upon its claimed waters (ICG 2012b, 9; *ABS-CBN News* 2012a; Avendaño 2012). However, on 21 June, Chinese ships remained at Scarborough Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 119). On the very same day, China announced the establishment of Sansha, a prefectural-level city to administer three disputed island groups of Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Macclefield Bank and Scarborough Shoal (P. Esplanada 2012). According to some reports, Chinese vessels withdrew on 25 June (*GMA News Online* 2012g), but 28 Chinese vessels, including five government ships and 23 fishing and utility boats, returned to Scarborough Shoal on 26 June, establishing China's de facto control over the Shoal and testing the Philippines' pledge to send vessels back (ICG 2012b, 9; *ABS-CBN News* 2012a; Avendaño 2012; *GMA News Online* 2012h). Manila ultimately decided not to re-deploy its ships. Since then, China has consolidated its control over the area and has maintained a permanent presence in the waters around the Shoal. One month after Philippine ships withdrew, China blocked Philippine vessels' access to the lagoon of Scarborough Shoal by placing barriers comprised of a long rope and fishing nets at the entrance of the lagoon (Del Callar 2012b), which remained in place until August 2012 (T. Burgonio and Tubeza 2012). It was also reported that several Chinese dinghies were also tied together and used to block the entrance (Del Callar 2012b). By September 2012, two Chinese maritime law enforcement ships and one FLEC vessel were reported to be patrolling waters around the Shoal and driving away Philippine fishing vessels (*ABS-CBN News* 2012b). Although the Aquino administration never officially admitted that they had lost Scarborough Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 121), by October 2012, a former Philippine Foreign Affairs Official admitted that China had established "de facto control" over the Shoal (*GMA News Online* 2012i).

6.3.4. Outcome: An evaluation

In the first phase of the stand-off, China succeeded in establishing its presence at the Shoal by employing two civilian ships to force the Philippine Navy ship to back down. However, Chinese attempts to compel Manila to withdraw all of its vessels at the Shoal were unsuccessful.

In the second phase, a variety of tools were used by China to coerce the Philippines. China employed a comprehensive approach, ranging from hacking websites and spreading rumours of war in the media, to imposing informal economic sanctions and conducting military exercises and weapon testing during the height of the crisis. During the second phase, the main aim of China's

⁴⁴ Jake Sullivan, e-mail to Hillary Clinton, June 17, 2012, available at <http://graphics.wsj.com/hillary-clinton-email-documents>, cited in (Green et al. 2017, 118)

⁴⁵ Jake Sullivan, e-mail to Hillary Clinton, June 17, 2012, available at <http://graphics.wsj.com/hillary-clinton-email-documents>, cited in (Green et al. 2017, 118)

maritime coercive diplomacy was to compel the Philippines not to "harass government vessels of China in performing their duties" (FMPRC 2012d) and accept Chinese vessels' exercise of their jurisdiction over Scarborough Shoal as well as over waters surrounding the Shoal. The objective of China's coercion also included coercing the Philippines to drop its confrontation against China by abandoning its efforts of internationalising the dispute. Yet, Chinese coercion did not succeed. The Philippines kept its vessels in place, and Manila became more insistent about bringing the Scarborough Shoal dispute to international arbitration.

In the final stage of the crisis, instead of using coercion directly against the Philippines, which had proved to be ineffective, China pressured the Philippines through the U.S. This indirect coercion helped China to achieve what it wanted. The Philippines withdrew its vessels, leaving China in control of the Shoal.

China's maritime coercive diplomacy effectively deterred the Philippines from physically contesting China's administration of Scarborough Shoal again in the years after the stand-off (Green et al. 2017, 121). Manila refrained from sending its vessels back to the disputed Shoal, while Beijing maintained a constant presence, thereby establishing an effective control over the Shoal and altering the status quo in its favour (Chubb 2016, 282; Fravel 2012).⁴⁶

However, Beijing failed to compel Manila to change its policy towards the dispute. Two months after the stand-off, Manila continued to employ "weapons of the weak", such as arbitration and the marshalling of international public opinion (Green et al. 2017, 121). In August, the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez stated that the country was gearing towards taking the legal track in settling the dispute with Beijing 'with or without' its cooperation (R. Chua 2012). In January 2013, Manila officially filed a Notification and Statement of Claim, initiating arbitral proceedings against China under Article 287 and Annex VII of the UNCLOS (PHDFA 2013). Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario told the *Financial Times* that the Scarborough Shoal case was the "catalyst" for Manila's decision to bring China to an international court (Dyer and Sevastopulo 2014).

More importantly, China's coercion against the Philippines in the tense two-month-long Scarborough Shoal stand-off hardened the latter's determination to balance the former by seeking U.S. support, bringing the U.S. Navy back to its former bases and building up its own military capabilities (Tonnesson 2014a, 209–10; De Castro 2016a, 141–43). After two years of considering rotational U.S. troop presence, Manila finally decided to enter into a negotiation with Washington on the Framework Agreement on Enhanced Rotational Presence and Agreement (De Castro 2016b, 174; 2014, 438). Aside from strengthening its alliance with the U.S., the Philippines also promoted its strategic partnership with Japan – China's main rival in East Asia. In the aftermath of the stand-off, Japan became more forthright in extending its security assistance to the Philippines by signing a bilateral agreement on maritime security in July 2012 (De Castro 2016b, 176). Therefore, as some experts noted, China's tactical victory in Scarborough Shoal stand-off "was most probably a setback" strategically (Tonnesson 2014a, 209).

⁴⁶ Following the adoption of a strong pro-Beijing policy by the new Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, in 2017, Beijing has allowed Philippine-registered fishing vessels to return to Scarborough Shoal (R. Jennings 2017).

6.4. Explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

This section analyses the asymmetry of motivation and power between the Philippines and China, the weakness in the U.S.' deterrence and domestic factors on the part of the Philippines as explanations for China's maritime coercive diplomacy outcome.

6.4.1. *The asymmetry of power and motivation*

The balance of motivation and power in regard to the disputes over Scarborough Shoal favoured the coercer right from the outset. This section analyses China's willingness to employ coercive strategy against the Philippines, the Philippines' fear of conflict escalation, and the magnitude of China's demands.

It is worth noting that this was not the first time the Philippines had conducted this type of operation at Scarborough Shoal. As aforementioned, the Philippines' Navy had previously arrested Chinese fishermen who were inside the Shoal (De Castro 2015b, 83–84; *Inquirer* 2012e). Previously, Beijing's response to these kinds of incidents only involved filing diplomatic protests (Green et al. 2017, 97; *Inquirer* 2012e). Chinese patrols sailed by the Shoal, but no effort had been undertaken to exercise effective control over the Shoal or its surrounding waters (Fravel 2012). Therefore, Chinese actions and statements marked a departure from its earlier approach to the dispute right from the outset (Morris 2017, 101–2). With the increase in China's material capabilities, Beijing was more willing and more confident in its ability to successfully prevent the Philippines from arresting of Chinese fishermen in the first place and to safely enforce control of disputed waters and features later on (Chubb 2016, 285).

The development of China's off-shore surveillance force and specific law enforcement capabilities and technologies has been extremely rapid. In June 2011, there were 9,000 personnel in this section using nine surveillance planes and 260 surveillance vessels (Sutter and Huang 2011, 71). The vessels dispatched to Scarborough Shoal belonged to the CMS and FLEC which were China's two most powerful maritime agencies at that time (Goldstein 2010; Dupont and Baker 2014, 88). They used unarmed vessels; however, the new FLEC ship that confronted the Philippine Navy was lightly armed (Moss 2012). Along with maritime militia and fishing fleets, these agencies took the lead in patrolling the South China Sea and in asserting Beijing's claims to territory and associated fishing grounds (McDevitt 2014, 33). By 2012, China had six vessels operating in the South China Sea at any given time. FLEC units in the South China Sea also began accompanying fishing fleets heading to disputed maritime areas in the same year (Green et al. 2017, 11; Masuda 2014, 68; *China News* 2010). Besides this, the technology and communication systems also augmented China's ability to administer disputed maritime spaces. Since the end of 2010, the Hainan provincial government had spent 12.5 million USD to install Beidou navigation equipment on 6,000 fishing boats across the province (Xinhua 2012i). China's indigenous Beidou navigation system, like the U.S.' Global Positioning System, allowed Chinese fishermen to send distress signals and reach the relevant authorities in the event of a maritime conflict (Xinhua 2012i). Through its instant alarms and unique short message service (Cang and Song 2014), Chinese fishermen sent alarming messages to Chinese authorities in Hainan when the Philippine personnel were approaching and planning to conduct arrests (Martinson 2018, 1).

Also, Chinese maritime power has grown rapidly in the 21st century. By 2012, the PLAN possessed the largest force of principal combatants, submarines, and amphibious warfare ships in Asia, with approximately 60 destroyers and frigates, 35 sub-marines, 51 amphibious ships, and 67 missile-equipped small combatants in its East and South China Sea Fleets alone (US DOD 2013, 76; Green et al. 2017, 10). According to a report of the U.S. Department of Defence, even though the PLAN remains at a distance, its deployed surface combatants are ready to respond to a deteriorating security environment (US DOD 2015a, 3).

Indeed, a range of evidences suggests that the PRC's interest in disputed areas with the Philippines had been increasing since 2010. The Philippines noticed an increasing number of Chinese fishing vessels in disputed waters, and in February 2011, a PLAN frigate fired three shots at Philippine fishing boats in Reed Bank. One month later, Filipino officials claimed that two Chinese patrol boats – *Haijian 71* and *75* – threatened to ram a Philippine research vessel while it was conducting a seismic survey in the waters near Reed Bank. In May of the same year, the Armed Forces of the Philippines claimed that two Chinese jet fighters flew into the Philippines' air space near Palawan. As Feng Zhang (2017, 443–44) notes, with the back-up of impressive new maritime capabilities, Beijing was determined to confront the Philippines at sea and eventually establish credible deterrence against Manila's attempts to challenge Chinese interests.

By contrast, the Philippines feared escalation for two reasons. First, the Philippines' capabilities cannot match those of China. The Philippines regularly uses naval vessels for law enforcement operations because of its limited number of combined navy and coast guard ships (J. Yang 2012). Indeed, the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* – the Philippines' largest warship – which was dispatched to the site to investigate the Chinese fishing boats, was, in fact, a former U.S. Coast Guard Cutter and was only lightly armed (Thayer 2012b). Thus, the Philippines was in no position to counter China militarily. The second reason relates to the Philippines' stakes at Scarborough Shoal. Before April 2012, neither China nor the Philippines maintained a permanent presence at Scarborough Shoal (Fravel 2012). The Philippines has no troops or personnel stationed at the Shoal. Hence, what is at stake for the Philippines is largely economic interests and sovereign rights over natural resources, primarily fish stocks. Escalating the crisis that might lead to a confrontation with China only to protect such interests would have been an excessively risky choice.

As a result, China's initiative achieved its maximum level of effectiveness. As some observers point out, China's *fait accompli* strategy in territorial disputes with smaller neighbours "involves drawing a line in the sea [...] us[ing] civilian maritime vessels as an initial challenge, [and] leaving smaller countries the risky option of escalating matters by resorting to military means" (Choong 2012). Typically, small countries choose to back down as they not only lack coast guard assets but are far outclassed by China militarily (Choong 2012). At the beginning of the stand-off, by sending two civilian vessels – *Haijian 75* and *84* – to confront the Philippines' Navy warship, China placed the Philippines in the first stage of a *fait accompli*, leaving either the risky option of escalation or accepting a Chinese presence at the Shoal. On 12 April, Philippine President Aquino decided to withdraw the warship *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* and replaced it with a 540-ton coast guard search and rescue vessel – the *BRP Pampanga*. This move, which was intended to demilitarise its presence and to prevent the stand-off from escalating into an armed confrontation, made China's first stage of *fait accompli* – establishing its presence at the Shoal – successful. Following this, the asymmetry of power and motivation over the Scarborough Shoal dispute

prevented the Philippines from redeploying its vessels to physically contesting China's administration of the Shoal after the stand-off.

However, Beijing's compulsion of Manila to accept its claims and to reverse Manila's policy of pursuing arbitration against China was unsuccessful, since China's demands in this respect went beyond the dispute over Scarborough Shoal. The implications of any concession from Manila over such a demand would affect the Philippines' claim to other features and waters in the South China Sea. Thus, the Philippines was determined to indirectly counter China's coercion by challenging its nine-dash line claim. Importantly, Manila's position as a treaty ally of the U.S. in the Southeast Asia instilled a level of confidence in this course of action. In its attempt to internationalise the South China Sea issue by bringing the dispute to international arbitration, the Philippines received the backing of the U.S., whose official statements have focused on the need for all claimants to follow the rules established under international law (McDevitt 2014, 5).

6.4.2. U.S. interests and reaction

6.4.2.1. U.S. interests and grey areas in the U.S. deterrence

That China was able to effectively use coercive diplomacy against the Philippines and take control of Scarborough Shoal was in part the result of the U.S.' reaction during the crisis. The U.S. made efforts to balance its interests in the region. On the one hand, the U.S. needed to credibly re-assure its allies and protect its interests in the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, it refrained from emboldening its allies to escalate disputes which might upset Washington's relationship with Beijing (Rogin 2012). Just a few months before the stand-off at Scarborough Shoal, the U.S. officially announced the pivot or rebalancing strategy to the Asia-Pacific. In October 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton published an article entitled *America's Pacific Century*, which emphasised the U.S.' renewed interest in the region (Clinton 2011). In November 2011, in an address delivered before Australia's Parliament, President Barack Obama stressed the "deliberate and strategic decision [that the U.S.] as a Pacific nation [...] will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future" (White House 2011). Also, in November 2011, the U.S. and the Philippines held a commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Mutual Defence Treaty and signed the Manila Declaration, which reaffirmed the alliance between the two countries. The disputes in the South China Sea were highlighted as key issues to be addressed in the region by both Clinton's and Obama's remarks (Fravel 2017, 242). Moreover, Clinton even used the Filipino name for the South China Sea – the "West Philippine Sea", when describing U.S. policy, creating a perception in the region of greater U.S. support for the Philippines (Fravel 2017, 242–43).

However, U.S. officials have reiterated that Washington will stay out of the region's territorial disputes,⁴⁷ and asserted that the U.S. government does not take a position on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Consequently, the U.S. deliberately maintained strategic ambiguity, specifically in its interpretation of the 1951 U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty. According to the Treaty, "[e]ach Party recognises that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes". The Article 5 states that "an armed attack on either of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the

⁴⁷ For comments to the press, the presentation of the Order of Lakandula, the signing of the Partnership for Growth and Joint Press Availability with Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario, see: (ICG 2012b, 25)

metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific" (US DOS 1951). As the treaty predates the Philippines' territorial claims in the South China Sea, so it is uncertain how the U.S. would interpret its application to disputed territories in the event of a conflict (ICG 2012b, 25; Lum 2012, 28). While some Filipino officials have suggested and sought assurances that the treaty obliges the U.S. to come to the defence of the Philippines if China were to take disputed territories in the South China Sea by force (Lum 2012, 28), some U.S. interpretations limit U.S. intervention to a foreign military attack on the main Philippine islands and upon Philippine military forces (Lum 2012, 28). So far, the U.S. has not clarified whether it understands the contested areas including Scarborough Shoal to be subject to U.S. obligations under the Treaty.

6.4.2.2. U.S. weak deterrence and China's risk calculation

For Chinese leaders, as long as China avoids using force and relies on paramilitary forces and civilian vessels instead, it will not force Washington to adopt an interpretation of the Mutual Defence Treaty with the inclusion of the disputed areas under its obligations (ICG 2012b, 25). Therefore, right from the beginning, China deployed only civilian vessels – *Haijian 75* and *84* – to the Shoal to force the Philippines' naval ship to back down. As Ely Ratner (2013), of the Centre for a New American Security, notes, "it was no accident that non-military maritime vessels served as the leading edge of Chinese coercion at Scarborough Reef". This helped to ensure that "the dispute would be settled as a lopsided arm wrestle between China's large and highly capable coast guard and the Philippines' near non-existent counterpart" (Ratner 2013). China pressed this advantage right up to – but still below – the line of militarization, which would have increased the likelihood of the U.S. Navy's response (Ratner 2013). In short, the risk could be potentially high for the U.S. to be embroiled in the dispute between China and the Philippines. The Chinese government is very conscious of this risk and has sent to Scarborough Shoal only civilian ships (Thayer 2012c; Bonnet 2012, 27).

Days after the stand-off began, the U.S. government made no official statement on the stand-off. The only U.S. statement urged "all parties to exercise full restraint and seek a diplomatic resolution", as released by a State Department spokesperson on a customary condition of anonymity (T. G. Santos and Pazzibugan 2012). The lack of an official U.S. statement on the tense situation worried Filipino senators and congressmen. One Filipino senator was critical of the role of its ally and of the Mutual Defence Treaty, asking "[w]hy is the US ominously silent this time?" and "what is the use of the Mutual Defence Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement for? We have a problem in Scarborough, how will you help us? Will you help us? Otherwise, what is the treaty for?" (T. G. Santos and Pazzibugan 2012).

Nearly a week after the beginning of the stand-off, the U.S. commenced the 28th annual Balikatan (Shoulder to Shoulder) bilateral military exercise with the Philippines from 16 to 27 April. According to Philippine military sources, some exercises, such as retaking an oil rig and amphibious landings, which had been open to the press in past years, were blacked out at the last minute. This move was made unilaterally by Washington to avoid antagonising Beijing (Green et al. 2017, 104–5; Labita 2012). It was not until 22 April that a relevant comment was made by a senior U.S. official, albeit in a "limited and maybe not preapproved manner" (Green et al. 2017, 107). In response to a question during a press conference about whether the U.S. would provide assistance in a scenario where Chinese forces attacked Philippine units at Scarborough Shoal, U.S.

Commander of the Marines in the Pacific Lieutenant General Duane Thiessen first dismissed any connection between the military exercises and the stand-off at Scarborough Shoal and then said with "deliberate ambiguity" (Green et al. 2017, 107) that the U.S. and the Philippines have a Mutual Defence Treaty "which guarantees that we get involved in each other's defence and that is self-explanatory" (Labita 2012). The remark suggested that the U.S. clearly had not yet decided whether it would intervene decisively in support of its ally (Green et al. 2017, 107; AFP 2012b). At this point, it seemed that the Mutual Defence Treaty has little deterrent value (Weatherbee 2012). At the closing ceremony of the Balikatan exercises, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Harry Thomas Jr. made no reference to the ongoing crisis and "only touched on the Mutual Defence Treaty in passing" (Green et al. 2017, 109).

China noted the grey area in the U.S.' commitment and concluded that there was a lack of U.S. commitment to the Philippines in the ongoing crisis. After Manila announced its plan to exchange views on the dispute with Washington during a U.S.-Philippine top defence and foreign policy officials' talk (or the 2+2 meeting) in late April, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin commented at a press conference on 24 April that "[g]enerally, a country does not take sides on other countries' sovereignty disputes. And we have noticed that none of the other countries has taken sides on the issue" (*China.Org.Cn* 2012). As one Chinese scholar summarised "the U.S. does not want to get involved in the stand-off between China and the Philippines [...]. One of the reasons that U.S. has held a joint military drill with the Philippines is because the country wants to show its obligation given the Mutual Defence Treaty between the two sides" (*Global Times* 2012). He highlighted the interpretation of most Americans that such a defence treaty protects the countries' sovereignty, rather than disputed areas, such that the U.S. would not let the issue damage its relations with China (*Global Times* 2012). In fact, China interpreted the ambiguity as a signal of no U.S. intervention. During the *Global Watch* programme on China Central Television on 25 April 2012, Gao Zugui of the CPC Central Committee Party Central School pointed out to the Philippines that "Manila is now misreading a lot of signals. It has misread the U.S.' possible intervention. [...] [The U.S.] hopes this dispute can be eased through diplomatic channels. Such a signal requires careful interpretation by the Philippines. The U.S. does not want to see real conflict in this situation [...]" (CCTV 2012). At this point, with increasing confidence that the U.S. would stay out of the current stand-off, the Chinese leaders might have found it less risky to assert its claims on the ground and put more pressure on the Philippines to withdraw its vessels from the Shoal. Just one day after the conclusion of the Balikatan military drill, on the morning of 28 April, China sent its fastest and most advanced *Yuzheng 310* back to the Shoal.

The Philippines believed that any suggestion of U.S. intervention would deter China (ICG 2012b, 25). The Aquino administration asked for reaffirmation of the Mutual Defence Treaty at the first "2+2 meeting" between the two countries' defence and foreign policy ministers on 30 April in Washington D.C. (ICG 2012b, 25). Although the U.S. reaffirmed its obligations under the Mutual Defence Treaty, in the remarks after the meeting, U.S. officials did not clarify whether the Treaty covered the Philippines' offshore claims, nor did they promise any direct U.S. intervention (Green et al. 2017, 110). The U.S. preserved its "strategic ambiguity" regarding the treaty implications of an outbreak of hostilities in the South China Sea (Ratner 2013). Secretary of State Clinton voiced concern about Scarborough Shoal, but underscored that "we do not take sides on the competing sovereignty claims to land features in the South China Sea" and that "the United States supports a collaborative diplomatic process" (US DOS 2012). In the very same press

conference, Clinton also emphasised the importance of the U.S.-China dynamic by stating that "[i]t's important not only to President Obama and me, but it's important to the people of the United States and the world, and we have worked hard to build an effective, constructive, comprehensive relationship that allows us to find ways to work together" (US DOS 2012).

Although China still expressed hostility to the U.S. interference in regional security affairs in response to the "2 + 2 meeting", Chinese media expressed appreciation for continued U.S. neutrality on sovereignty claims (Green et al. 2017, 111). According to a Xinhua commentary written in early May, "[f]rom the very beginning, the Philippines has indulged in its own imagination and miscalculated the situation. [...] The Philippines' strategy has not gained the results for which it hoped. [...] U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also made it clear that Washington would not take sides on the sovereignty dispute over the South China Sea" (Xinhua 2012f). As Yang Yi, Rear Admiral and former Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the People's Liberation Army National Defence University squarely put it, the alliance between the US and the Philippines is typical of an alliance between a big power and a small country, in which the big power fears being dragged into a conflict not of its choosing, while the small country fears being sacrificed to the interests of its powerful ally. He argues that the US wants to make use of China's disputes with its neighbours to contain and balance China but does not want to become involved in any direct military conflict with China. He notes that the U.S.' "recent promise of not "taking sides" bears testimony to this policy" (Y. Yang 2012).

The Chinese quickly identified the points of divergence between U.S. and Philippine interests (Abb 2016, 147). The fact that the U.S. was reluctant to cover disputed features like Scarborough Shoal under the alliance obligations and has never taken an official position on these disputes resulted in ambiguity, which weakened the deterrent value of U.S. deployments in the region (X. Chen 2012; Ren 2012; Abb 2016, 147). China exploited these grey areas to further its sovereignty claims and interests without fear of a confrontation with the U.S. As Ely Ratner and Elbridge Colby (2014) argue, too much caution, especially with China as the initiator, could be read as U.S. weakness, thereby perpetuating rather than diminishing China's incentives toward adventurism. As a consequence, China hardened its coercion against the Philippines throughout May by escalating the rhetoric, imposing informal economic sanctions, and deploying a large flotilla of vessels to maintain a constant presence and challenge the Philippines' control over the Scarborough Shoal, which ultimately led to a final *fait accompli* in June.

After the report on China's warships and military exercises in the South China Sea on 13 May, the U.S. submarine USS *North Carolina* arrived at Subic Bay. This surprise move was interpreted as a signal of its support to Manila and deterrence towards China, but it did not intervene (Glaser and Szalwinski 2013, 7; Lum 2012, 27).

On 6 June, Filipino President Aquino travelled to the United States for high-level meetings. The Philippines, however, did not gain anything more than what the U.S. had delivered at the previous "2+2 meeting" in late April. The U.S. side was again careful to avoid committing to the defence of the Philippines should China move to reclaim and militarise the Shoal. Indeed, during their brief appearance in front of the press following Aquino's visit to the Oval Office, Obama even failed to mention China, and did not refer to Scarborough Shoal in his public remarks (White House 2012). American officials were cautious and reluctant to make such a commitment, perhaps

out of a fear of larger alliance entrapment risks, which explains (in part) why the U.S. brokered the ultimately unsuccessful withdrawal deal that led to China's decision to make gain by a fait accompli and its constant presence at Scarborough Shoal from 2012 (Greitens 2016, 7).

Although access to the policy calculations of Chinese leaders is limited, George and Smoke (1974, 537) posits, the fait accompli strategy is the most rational way to initiate an effort to change the status quo when the initiator believes that a strong potential defending power appears to be withholding support. A fait accompli gives him little or no time to reverse his policy of non-involvement. For the initiator, the fait accompli strategy could appear to be the least risky approach in this circumstance to change the status quo (George and Smoke 1974, 537). Official statements and Chinese media reading U.S. signals and gray zones in the U.S. commitment during the crisis expressed a confidence from the Chinese side that the U.S. would not intervene on behalf of its Southeast Asian ally should there be a conflict over Scarborough Shoal. Beijing could therefore believe that it could implement a fait accompli without provoking a military confrontation; in other words, that it could nibble Scarborough Shoal at minimal risk (Ratner 2013).

6.4.3. Domestic factors

In the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, China resorted to punitive economic measures, including quarantine restrictions on banana imports and the cancellation of tourist visits, to put pressure on the Philippines. These measures caused economic costs to certain groups and business communities in the Philippines, who in turn pressurised the Philippine government to change its behaviour and policies towards China.

Indeed, due to high economic costs, the Philippine government was being pressured by its own business communities (*South China Morning Post* 2012), and the perceived fallout of the Scarborough Shoal stand-off made Philippine businessmen apprehensive (De Castro 2015a, 121; *South China Morning Post* 2012). Business leaders of the Mindanao-region banana industry blamed Manila for mishandling the crisis. According to the Mindanao Business Council, the crisis "should have been approached as a simple poaching problem instead of a sovereignty issue" (*MindaNews* 2012). In their eyes, the government's approach caused the problem and "collateral damage" to the business sector (Avendaño and Lacorte 2012; *MindaNews* 2012). It was reported that the businessmen had written letters to urge President Aquino to quickly resolve the impasse and find a peaceful solution (*South China Morning Post* 2012). Filipino business leaders also asked the Aquino administration to abandon its confrontational approach in the Scarborough Shoal in order to stop the rapid deterioration of Sino-Philippine economic relations (De Castro 2015a, 121; Glaser 2012).

It cannot be denied that, to a certain extent, China's punitive economic measures effectively created pressure on the Philippine government. That is because the fruit restrictions and travel alerts were employed on a limited scale, in relation to the extent of the main foreign policy goals pursued by China – in this case of prompting the Philippines to withdraw its vessels from Scarborough Shoal (Ravindran 2012, 121; Glaser 2012). If Chinese punitive economic measures had been applied on a larger scale, aiming at eliciting the same policy concession from the Philippines, they would have been counterproductive. Rather than putting pressure on the government to adopt a less confrontational approach to China in the stand-off, powerful groups

and business communities would have come together to back the government's resistance (Ravindran 2012, 121), and that was not the outcome that China wanted.

Despite the fact that the pressure from powerful groups had an impact on the government of the Philippines in their approach to the Chinese during the stand-off, this domestic factor did not play a major role in Manila's final decision to withdraw its vessels from Scarborough Shoal or to manage its relationship with Beijing later on. Manila withdrew its vessels predominantly because of the pressure from the U.S. Also, Manila's fear of unacceptable escalation prevented it from physically challenging Chinese presence and administrative operations at the Shoal. In spite of the call from the business communities, the overall confrontational approach towards China over Scarborough Shoal was still adopted by the Aquino administration.

6.5. Analytical summary

In the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, China applied a "gradual turning of the screw" approach, by incrementally stepping up pressure on the Philippines, and then employed a tacit ultimatum. China increased the number of vessels at the Shoal, maintaining a constant presence and locking down administrative control by denying the Philippines ships access. Besides this, China employed informal economic sanctions that curbed Philippines fruit exports. Pressures on the Philippines also came from the escalating rhetoric and warnings of war preparation spread in Chinese national media and military exercises conducted by the PLAN in the South China Sea during the height of the stand-off. Pressures were gradually applied to achieve a range of political objectives, which included deterring Manila from arresting Chinese fishermen, intervening into future Chinese fishing activities at Scarborough Reef, to compelling Manila to accept China's presence at the Shoal and change its confrontation policy towards China.

In the tense two-month stand-off, China's maritime coercive diplomacy was effective in achieving three main objectives. First, the Philippines was unable to carry out the arrest of Chinese fishermen. Second, by withdrawing its vessels from the site before China, the Philippine authorities lost its control over the Shoal and left it to the Chinese. It also appears that China has established "a credible deterrence" (F. Zhou 2016, 877, 880). Third, China's coercive diplomacy was successful in achieving the aim of preventing the Philippines from contesting China's administration of the Shoal physically in the aftermath of the stand-off. However, it failed to compel the Philippines to accept China's claims and drop its attempt to internationalise the dispute by pursuing an international arbitration case as well as in seeking more U.S. support.

The effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy during the crisis can be attributed to the asymmetry of motivation and power capabilities between China and the Philippines, as well as the weakness of the U.S. deterrence. China's deterrence was based on its growing material capabilities, including economic might, technological infrastructure, and maritime law enforcement capabilities. China's power superiority explains the willingness to resort to paramilitary manoeuvres and the reliance on civilian ships to force the Philippines' warship to back down, thereby placing onus on the Philippines to either escalate or accept China's presence at the Shoal. The fear of escalation prevented Manila from making attempt to challenge China's presence and ultimate de facto control of the Shoal. Furthermore, that the Philippines has no personnel stationed at the Shoal did not provide Manila with enough motivation to pursue such an

escalation. On the dominant power side, the U.S. not only delivered a weak deterrent signal, but eventually also directly intervened to put pressure on the Philippines to withdraw its vessels from the Shoal. The ambiguity in the interpretation of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty and the U.S.' policy of not taking sides in territorial disputes in the South China Sea made Chinese leaders believe that the U.S. would not risk the stability of U.S.-China relations and that the U.S. feared to be dragged into the dispute between China and the Philippines. China's confidence that the U.S. would not intervene should a conflict break out over Scarborough Shoal led to the selection of a *fait accompli* strategy to establish a new status quo over Scarborough Shoal. However, China's demand that the Philippines change its policy toward China's claims and the dispute resolution went far beyond the Philippines' limited interests in the Scarborough Shoal dispute, engaging the larger interests of the Philippines in the broader maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea. In this respect, the asymmetry of motivation worked in the Philippines' favour and limited the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy.

Lastly, there was a close coordination among Chinese relevant government agencies from the onset of the crisis. The deployment of the two CMS vessels in the first place was a decision taken by the CMS Headquarter, the SOA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the top leadership. Furthermore, during the stand-off, a huge flotilla of vessels was dispatched to the scene. Such a deployment would have been impossible without the approval of top Chinese leaders. The case demonstrates that the level of coordination among various governmental agencies and paramilitary forces actually contributed to successfully stopping the Philippines arresting Chinese fishing personnel and also allowed China to effectively take control of the Shoal. On the part of the target, a domestic constraint was present in this case. Due to the economic costs inflicted by China's punitive economic measures, Philippine business communities pressurised the government to approach the crisis differently and adopt a less confrontational policy in the Scarborough Shoal. The impact of this pressure cannot be discounted; however, this domestic constraint played a less major role in the decision to withdraw Philippine vessels from the Shoal, leading to China's taking *de facto* control of the Shoal. Also, following the stand-off, the Aquino administration refused to abandon its confrontational policy towards China in the South China Sea disputes, but continued to challenge China's claim over Scarborough Shoal on the legal front.

Chapter 7

The Second Thomas Shoal tensions, 2013–2014

This chapter examines China's employment of maritime coercive diplomacy towards the Philippines in the dispute over Second Thomas Shoal. In providing a brief overview of the dispute before 2013, main issues over the Shoal's status and the claims of each side are identified. The next section details China's law enforcement capabilities and its objectives. China's use of maritime coercion is divided into three episodes of mid-2013 tensions, China's first blockage in early March 2014, and the second blockage attempt of the late March 2014. The chapter examines China's execution of coercive diplomacy to highlight the tactics used and evaluate the extent to which Chinese coercion achieved its objectives. The chapter then provides explanations for the outcome by examining the asymmetry of motivation and the U.S.' stakes and reaction to the tensions.

7.1. Background

Second Thomas Shoal, known as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines and Ren'ai Reef in China, is a coral reef located 106 nautical miles west of Palawan Island, Philippines and more than 800 nautical miles from the Chinese coast (Thayer 2015a, 6; USCC 2014, 246). The Shoal sits at the southwestern edge of an area called Reed Bank, which is believed to contain vast reserves of oil and natural gas, and is 15 kilometres long and five kilometres wide (Himmelman 2013). It lies only 22 nautical miles from Mischief Reef, which was occupied by China in 1995 and has since become the "most active base" of the Chinese Navy in the South China Sea (Agnote 2015).

The reef is situated inside the Philippines' 200-nautical-mile EEZ and on the Philippines' presumed continental shelf. Second Thomas Shoal is not an island or even a rock, but a low-tide elevation under UNCLOS. Such a feature does not enjoy any entitlement to sovereignty and belongs to the state that has sovereignty over the continental shelf on which it rests; by all indications, this is the Philippines (Poling 2014a, 2). However, like other features within the nine-dash line, it is claimed by China and Taiwan (Poling 2014a, 1). Beijing claims the reef as a "constituent part" of the Spratly Islands and the "adjacent waters", over which China maintains that it has enjoyed sovereignty for roughly two millennia (Green et al. 2017, 170; FMPRC 2015d).

In 1999, the Philippines' *BRP Sierra Madre* – a World War II-era U.S. tank-landing ship – ran aground on Second Thomas Shoal (Glaser and Szalwinski 2013, 6). The Philippines has stationed a handful of its marines aboard *BRP Sierra Madre* ever since (Himmelman 2013; *BBC* 2014c). Fresh troops and supplies are sent to *BRP Sierra Madre* every few months (Poling 2014a, 1–2) to ensure that it can continue to serve as a Philippine military outpost (Mogato 2015b). In spite of the fact that the *BRP Sierra Madre* is severely rusted and lists slightly to one side, the Philippine military has not decommissioned the vessel (AP 2014c). It remains an active-duty-commissioned naval ship. This makes the ship an extension of the Philippine government and means that any attack on the ship is tantamount to an assault against the Philippines (AP 2014c). It also serves as a symbol of the Philippines' claims over the territory (Keck 2014), and as a Philippine base to monitor activities around Mischief Reef and discourage any further incursions into Philippine waters (Baviera and Batongbacal 2013, 26). According to an official spokesperson

for China's Foreign Ministry, since 1999 China has repeatedly demanded that the Philippines tow away the *BRP Sierra Madre* (Xinhua 2013c).⁴⁸

From mid-2013, China dispatched military and fishing vessels to Second Thomas Shoal, and maintained regular surveillance and patrol activities in waters surrounding the Shoal until November 2013. In early March 2014, China blocked access to Second Thomas Shoal for the Philippines ships carrying supplies to the garrison, claiming they were actually carrying construction materials to fortify the existing outpost. Three weeks later, on 29 March, Chinese ships again harassed another Philippine vessel attempting to resupply and relieve the soldiers on board the *BRP Sierra Madre*. By entering the shallow waters around the Shoal, the Philippine supply ship eventually reached Second Thomas Shoal and successfully delivered supplies to Filipino marines.

7.2. China's increased maritime law enforcement capabilities and objectives

Since early 2013, the Philippines' plans of construction on Second Thomas Shoal caused Beijing concern. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in February 2013, the Philippines lined up cables around the grounded *BRP Sierra Madre* so as to make preparations for the construction of a permanent outpost (FMPRC 2016b; Republic of the Philippines 2014c). One report stated that, in 2013, President Aquino instructed the Armed Forces of the Philippines to repair the rusting *BRP Sierra Madre* so that the Philippines could maintain its presence at the Shoal (Glaser and Szalwinski 2013, 6). In April 2013, a classified Philippine government report stated that China had once again demanded that the Philippines "withdraw all its nationals and facilities from the disputed features in the Spratlys" including the removal of the *BRP Sierra Madre*, adding that the Philippines had ignored the demand (Thayer 2013, 6; Republic of the Philippines 2014b).

China recognises the Philippines' presence at eight locations in the South China Sea – Lawak, Patag, Parola, Pag-asa, Kota, Panata, Rizal, Likas – but not at Second Thomas Shoal (Tordesillas 2014a; 2013). From China's perspective, the *BRP Sierra Madre*'s presence alone is provocative, as a grounded ship with soldiers stationed on board clearly has the function of asserting Philippines sovereignty over the disputed region (Tiezzi 2015a). Manila's attempt to repair the *BRP Sierra Madre* constituted a further provocation and a challenge to China's claims over Second Thomas Shoal (Glaser and Szalwinski 2013, 7). One Chinese military expert noted that even if the Philippines was just shipping materials to carry out repairs, Beijing saw Manila's ultimate goal as "consolidating" the wrecked ship into a "permanent settlement" (Chu 2014, 15; Green et al. 2017, 184). Thus, China's maritime coercive diplomacy against the Philippines over Second Thomas Shoal was also explicitly aimed at deterring Manila from undertaking any construction work at the shoal.

China also had another political objective related to the Philippines' efforts to internationalise the disputes. As mentioned in Chapter Six, the year after China took control of Scarborough Shoal, the Philippines initiated UNCLOS arbitral proceedings to challenge the validity of China's claims in the South China Sea. From March to June 2013, the President of the

⁴⁸ In addition, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated on 1 July 2013 that Manila cited a lack of "component parts" when justifying its refusal to remove the ship from Second Thomas Shoal (Xinhua 2013c).

ITLOS appointed five arbitrators. In late June, the Tribunal was established. For China, the Philippines' submission of the dispute to arbitration was a "hostile act" (Republic of the Philippines 2014c), which constituted part of Manila's policy of confronting China. Later, Chinese officials of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs within the Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed that "we reject the arbitration proceedings by the Philippines" and that "arbitration is a political provocation under the cloak" in a meeting with the Philippines' Embassy to Beijing (Republic of the Philippines 2014e). Thus, in part, China's maritime coercive diplomacy could have been designed to pressurise the Philippines into ceasing its "hostile act" against China as well as to compel the Philippines to return to what Wang Dong (2012, 20) has called "the cooperation game".

Nevertheless, China could not have carried out its maritime coercive diplomacy against the Philippines in 2013 and 2014 without increased maritime law enforcement capabilities. It was reported that, in 2013 and 2014, China launched more naval ships than any other country in the region (ONI 2015, 12). During 2014 alone, more than 60 naval ships and craft were laid down, launched, or commissioned by the PLAN (ONI 2015, 10). China's military spending also continued to grow. In 2014, China's military spending increased by 12.2 percent to 131.5 billion USD after a 10.7 percent rise in 2013 (Rajagopalan 2014).

The development of China's law enforcement capabilities was also impressive between 2013 and 2014. In March 2013, Chinese State Council announced the reform of Chinese maritime law enforcement agencies in order to "enhance the protection of ocean resources [...] and safeguard the state's maritime rights and interests". With the exception of the Maritime Safety Administration, under the Ministry of Transport, four of the five maritime law enforcement agencies were combined to form a new China Coast Guard under the administrative control of the newly expanded SOA and the operational control of the Ministry of Public Security (Masuda 2014, 74–76; Morris 2017, 85–87; ONI 2015, 40–42).⁴⁹ Some experts believe that Chinese policy makers implemented this reform whilst envisioning sovereignty protection as the top priority for the unified Coast Guard (Morris 2017, 85). This reform represents the bureaucratic manifestation of Chinese leaders' broader commitment to build the world's largest and most powerful coast guard forces (Morris 2017, 83). This was facilitated by a substantial increase in Chinese government spending in 2013. China spent nearly 1.8 billion USD in 2013 and approximately 2 billion USD compared with only around 1.4 billion USD in 2012, including both operational and shipbuilding costs for its coast guard (Morris 2017, 83; CSIS 2019).

⁴⁹ In July 2018, the Chinese Coast Guard was formally incorporated into the People's Armed Police, which receives orders from the Central Military Commission, headed by the Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping.

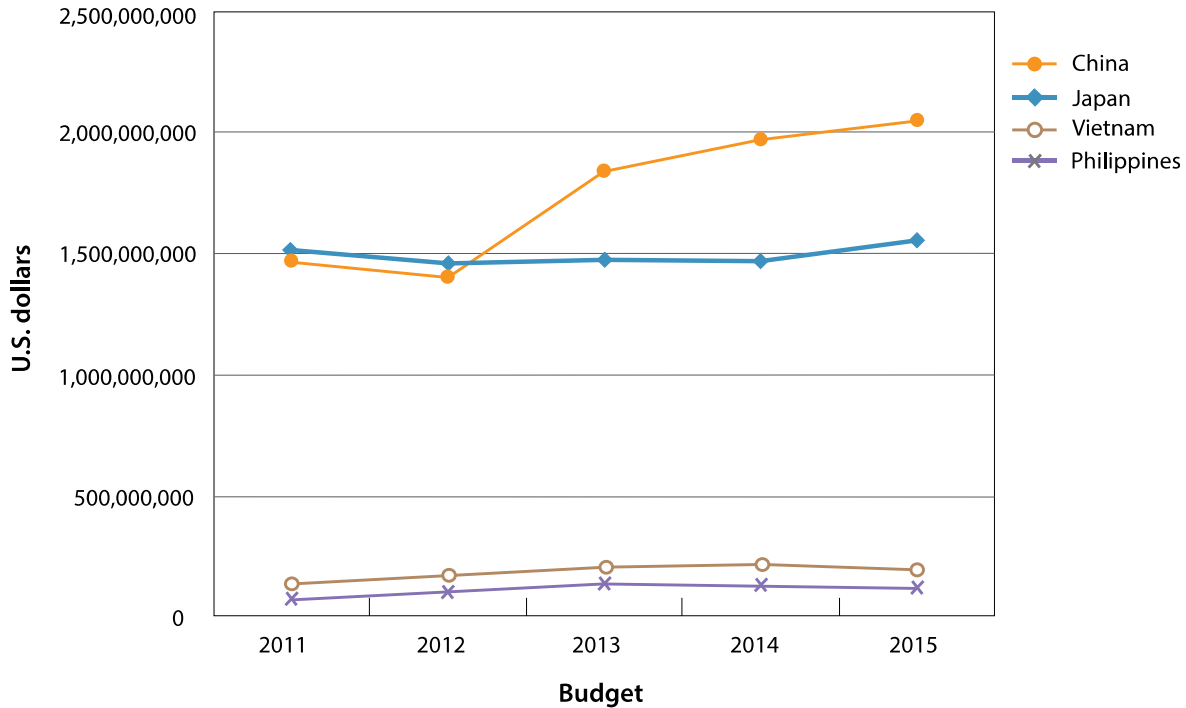


Figure 6: **The Coast Guard budgets of China, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, 2011–15**
 Source: Morris, Lyle J, ‘Blunt Defenders of Sovereignty: The Rise of Coast Guards in East and Southeast Asia’, *Naval War College Review* 70, No. 2 (2017): 84.

For more than a decade, China's maritime law enforcement had undergone a major modernisation, which increased both the sizes of its ships and their overall capability (ONI 2015, 42). These civilian maritime forces added approximately 100 new large patrol ships, patrol combatants/craft, and auxiliary/support ships, not including small patrol boats (ONI 2015, 42). According to data from a U.S. Department of Defence report on China's military and security developments, from 2011 to 2015 civilian maritime forces have added at least 30 new ships (US DOD 2015a, 44). The U.S. Office of Naval intelligence also reports that China's Coast Guard has around 205 vessels, 95 of which are greater than 1,000 tons (ONI 2015, 41). Since the 2013 reorganisation, most of the coast guard vessels have been refashioned with front- or rear-mounted autocannon or both and most officers carry light arms on board (Morris 2017, 84). As Lyle Morris, a policy analyst at the RAND, notes, the Chinese coast guard has become more confident following the reform (Morris 2017, 87).

In early 2013, Wu Zhuang, Chief of the South China Sea Fishery Bureau, stated that "[w]ith the growth of law enforcement capacity, the country [China] will speed up the routine patrols, especially in the waters near the Nansha Islands" (Xinhua 2013a). In 2013, routine fishery patrols in the waters surrounding the Spratly Islands became the top priority. China's Ocean Development Report, released in May 2013, set the target of doubling the number of offshore air patrols in two years (Tuyay 2013).

The U.S. Department of Defence indicated that the increased maritime law enforcement capabilities have afforded China the capability to patrol more robustly its claims in the disputed waters (US DOD 2015a, 44). In other words, against the backdrop of increasing military capabilities and rising levels of coast guard assets, China's leaders appeared increasingly willing to assert China's maritime claims by overwhelming and then deterring other claimant nations, including the Philippines over Second Thomas Shoal (ONI 2015, 4; US DOD 2015a, 3).

In sum, Beijing's growing capabilities, particularly in maritime law enforcement, have contributed to its decision to adopt more assertive tactics when perceiving that its maritime claims were being challenged by the Philippines' plan to reinforce the Second Thomas Shoal outpost (ONI 2015, 8). Through coercive diplomacy, China's goals were to forcefully persuade Manila to withdraw all personnel and facilities from Second Thomas Shoal, deter the Philippines from carrying out any "planned construction and reinforcement", and compel Manila to cease its pursuit of arbitration and return to the bilateral negotiating table.

7.3. China's maritime coercive diplomacy at Second Thomas Shoal, 2013–2014

This section presents China's maritime coercive diplomacy activities, which were designed to put pressure on the Philippines into submission. It details three episodes: China's increasingly physical presence at the Shoal from May to November 2013, the first blockage of Philippines vessels from reaching the *BRP Sierra Madre* in early March 2014 and the second blockage attempt in late March 2014. In addition, this section examines the tools China used to pressure Manila and evaluates the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

7.3.1. Increasing physical presence, May – November 2013

Since February 2013, sightings of Chinese government vessels in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal caused alarm in Manila (Republic of the Philippines 2014b; Agnote 2013), as no such vessels had reportedly ever been deployed to the Shoal before (Republic of the Philippines 2014a, 61). In early May 2013, the presence of Chinese ships near Second Thomas Shoal was confirmed by the Philippine military. This prompted Manila to file a diplomatic protest with the Chinese Embassy over "the provocative and illegal presence" caused by the intrusion of two CMS ships and one navy missile frigate around Second Thomas Shoal, which was within the Philippines' EEZ (*InterAksyon* 2013; Quismundo 2013; Tamayo 2013; Green et al. 2017, 175).

A few days later, a Philippine utility boat of Kalayaan island town, which was carrying the town mayor and 147 civilians, was chased by a Chinese warship for about an hour as the boat was passing by Second Thomas Shoal (Laude 2013a). On 21 May, the Philippines confirmed that a flotilla of around 30 Chinese fishing vessels, two CMS ships and one warship were at Second Thomas Shoal for more than a week (Tamayo 2013; Lee-Brago and Romero 2013). These activities led to the Philippine Armed Forces' conclusion of a "near-occupation of Chinese vessels of Second Thomas Shoal" in the early weeks of May 2013 (Republic of the Philippines 2014b). The Philippine Armed Forces assessed that the heightened activity of these Chinese vessels "could be intended to pre-empt the Philippines' plan of fortifying its detachment to the said area" (Republic of the Philippines 2014b).

On 25 May, China announced a rare show of force in the South China Sea, in which all three fleets – North Sea, East Sea and South Sea – took part in their first joint military exercise since 2010 (Le Mière 2013; Choi 2013). Yue Gang, a retired PLA Colonel, told *South China Morning Post* that this South China Sea military drill was meant to send a message to Manila that Beijing's "tough stance" would continue (Choi 2013).

The Chinese pressured the Philippines primarily by maintaining a constant presence – using multiple patrol ships from the newly unified China Coast Guard and a number of civilian fishing vessels – in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal (Republic of the Philippines 2014b). According to the Philippines, the number of Chinese vessels was reduced after June 2013 (Republic of the Philippines 2014a, 133) but their presence in and around Second Thomas Shoal continued until November 2013 (Green et al. 2017, 181; Laude 2013b). These ships ventured closer to the Philippines' *BRP Sierra Madre* than ever before (Baviera and Batongbacal 2013, 26).

On the diplomatic front, China attached what Philippine President Benigno Aquino described as "unacceptable conditions" on his attendance to the annual China-ASEAN Trade and Business Expo in Nanning. China's Foreign Ministry stated that there were "difficulties" in relations and urged Manila to rectify them. It is not too difficult to guess that the "difficulties" and conditions were related to the maritime confrontation over the Second Thomas Shoal. Due to this, President Aquino cancelled his planned trip on 3 September 2013 (Sutter and Huang 2013b, 65). China continued to re-assert its "indisputable sovereignty" over the Spratlys including Second Thomas Shoal (Mogato 2013), condemning the Philippines' "illegal" grounding of the *BRP Sierra Madre* as well as Manila's prolonged refusal to remove the warship (Green et al. 2017, 178; Xinhua 2013b). Both the Chinese Ambassador, Ma Keqing, and a Chinese Ministry of National Defence spokesperson explained that they were primarily concerned with the possibility that Manila might erect "additional structures" on the Shoal. According to Ambassador Ma, Chinese forces were "continuously monitoring" the Shoal to guard against any new construction (Green et al. 2017, 177; Romero 2013). The Philippines rebuked such a plan, but stressed that they were free to undertake any activity in the Shoal without notifying China (AP 2013b). Filipino officials also raised concerns that the Chinese ships might block supplies to the detachment of Filipino marines stationed on *BRP Sierra Madre* (Mogato 2013); however, during 2013, resupply missions and personnel rotation were carried out without any obstruction from Chinese vessels in the region (AP 2013a).

The heightened activity of Chinese vessels in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal took place in the context of Manila's decision to file a case against China over the disputes in the South China Sea at the PCA. On 27 August 2013, the Tribunal adopted the first Procedural Order to set 30 March 2014 as the date for the filing of the Memorial by the Philippines (Republic of the Philippines 2014a, 1). In early 2014, it was reported that Manila received an offer from China through a backdoor channel of an agreement to de-escalate disputes in the South China Sea (Green et al. 2017, 182). Beijing did not ask Manila to withdraw the suit, but to postpone filing the Memorial until after the 30 March deadline set by ITLOS in exchange for a mutual withdrawal of ships from Scarborough Shoal and more investments in the Philippines (Green et al. 2017, 182; Tordesillas 2014b; R. Robles and Ng 2014). One Philippine former National Security Adviser saw this as evidence that China was "worried" about the Memorial, and that Beijing's offer was "a sign of weakness" (Diola 2014a).

In mid-February 2014, Chinese government vessels returned to Second Thomas Shoal and re-established an "active presence" (Green et al. 2017, 182–83; Laude 2014a). At the same time, Philippine spokespersons announced that the government had decided to proceed with the Memorial, and on 28 February, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario affirmed Manila's resolve to meet the deadline of submission (Green et al. 2017, 183). Manila also asked the Tribunal to amend its Statement of Claim, adding a request to determine the status of Second Thomas Shoal (Republic of the Philippines 2014a, 2). Also on 28 February, when asked to comment on these reports, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson denied the existence of any bargain and labelled the reports "sheer fabrication" (FMPRC 2014b). Observers warned about a possible backlash from China in case Manila filed the memorial. Some expected China to "somehow impose sanctions". On 6 March 2014, the former Philippine Interior Secretary, Rafael Alunan III, claimed China was "threatening" Manila privately not to file its memorial, "or else" (Diola 2014a; Esmaguel 2014b; Green et al. 2017, 183).

7.3.2. March 2014 blockage

According to the Philippines' report, on 9 March 2014 two ships contracted by the Philippine Navy to deliver supplies and replacement troops to the *BRP Sierra Madre* were prevented from doing so by two Chinese Coast Guard vessels: *3112* and *3113* (Republic of the Philippines 2014d; PHDFA 2014a; Teves 2014; AP 2014a). This was the first time in 15 years that China had interfered in the Philippines' routine resupply (Quismundo 2014a), which used civilian ships to avoid confrontation since 2013 (Keck 2014). The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs reported that Chinese ships used "digital signs, sirens and megaphones" to "shoo away" and order the Philippine vessels to leave the area (Republic of the Philippines 2014d; Quismundo 2014a; Teves 2014; AP 2014a). The Philippine ships had to abort the resupply and personnel rotation mission, returning to Palawan, the nearest Philippine province to the Shoal (Teves 2014; AP 2014a).

On 7 March, two days before Chinese vessels' blocking of Philippine ships at Second Thomas Shoal, the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs within the Chinese Foreign Ministry invited the Philippine Embassy in China for a meeting (Republic of the Philippines 2014c). The Philippine Embassy noted that the invitation contained a "sense of urgency on the part of the Chinese side" and that Second Thomas Shoal was "the only agenda" of the meeting (Republic of the Philippines 2014f). During the meeting, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Representative Xiao Jiangguo told the Philippine Embassy representatives that China had heard about Philippine plans to carry out "large scale construction" at Second Thomas Shoal and expressed China's "grave concern". Xiao demanded that the Philippines "put an end to any construction work or plans". He emphasised that "if the Philippines chooses to ignore China's major concerns and resolute objections, [and] insists on construction, this would severely violate China's sovereign rights [and] push China's bottom line", adding that "China will not sit idly by and tolerate [this]. We will take resolute measures and actions. There will be further damage to relations. All consequences will borne by the Philippines side" (Republic of the Philippines 2014c). In its report to the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs after the meeting, the Philippine Embassy to China assessed that "[i]f the reports are true that Philippine vessels were carrying construction materials to Ayungin, the Chinese side's prior knowledge of Philippine moves seems

to indicate the Chinese side's increasing surveillance and pressure" on Second Thomas Shoal (Republic of the Philippines 2014f).

After the blockage, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang declared that its vessels "on routine patrol in waters off" Second Thomas Shoal had spotted two Philippine-flagged ships, which departed the area after being warned off. China claimed that Philippine ships were approaching Second Thomas Shoal loaded with construction materials in an attempt to carry out work on Second Thomas Shoal and that China needed to undertake a "necessary response" (FMPRC 2014c). According to China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, China demanded that the Philippines tow away the ship, but Manila cited "technical reasons" for being unable to do so. Beijing thus accused Manila of "infring[ing] upon" Chinese territorial sovereignty and of "blatantly violat[ing]" the DOC signed in 2002 (FMPRC 2014c; Xinhua 2014a).

On 12 March 2014, the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned the Head of the Philippine Embassy in China to reject the Philippines' protest (Diola 2014b; Xinhua 2014b). Chinese Embassy spokesperson Zhuang Hua, meanwhile, denounced Manila's statement of ownership of Second Thomas Shoal as unacceptable and demanded the immediate removal of the stranded warship from the Shoal (Diola 2014b). In the subsequent press conferences on 13 and 17 March 2014, the Chinese Foreign Ministry provided more allegations. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons stated that the Philippines made an "unequivocal commitment" to tow away the *BRP Sierra Madre* in 1999 and again in 2003 (FMPRC 2014e). However, the Philippines sent two ships transporting concrete, rebar and other construction materials with the aim of "building facilities" on Second Thomas Shoal (FMPRC 2014d). China called it "an out-and-out provocation", which gave China "every reason to send away the two Philippine ships" (FMPRC 2014d). China repeated that the Philippines' behaviour was "against its own commitment" and violated the DOC (FMPRC 2014e). On 17 March, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei emphasised that China never allowed "any form of occupation of the Ren'ai Reef nor violation of the DOC by the Philippine side" (FMPRC 2014e). He warned that the Chinese "watched closely" and "[were] highly vigilant on further possible provocations in the South China Sea by the Philippines", adding that Manila "must bear all the consequences of what will happen" (FMPRC 2014e).

Chinese media echoed the statements made by the Foreign Ministry. One front-page commentary in the *People's Daily Overseas Edition* stated that "it is impossible for China to tolerate the evil move by the Philippines" (People's Daily 2014a), and *Global Times* published one piece on 13 March suggesting that "the dispute must end with the Philippines ending the grounding of the navy vessel either by the Philippines towing the vessel away, or by the vessel becoming uninhabitable" and that "China will resolutely not allow the Philippines to repair the boat, and will not allow the Philippines to conduct any other construction works" (Huanqiu 2014a). A *Global Times* editorial appearing on 14 March warned that "China is capable of resolving this dispute for good in an aggressive way, and Chinese society is also calling for such an approach". It added that "[a]ny aggressive actions that Manila wants to take on the reef will only cause it to learn new lessons from China [...]" (Global Times 2014a).

Two days after the blockage, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs summoned the second highest Chinese Embassy official, the Chinese Charge d'Affaires, Sun Xiangyang, to handover a *Note Verbale* to object to China's action, which, according to Manila, constituted "a

clear and urgent threat to the rights and interests of the Philippines" (*Reuters* 2014a; PHDFA 2014a). In response to China's demand for removing the grounded navy ship from Second Thomas Shoal, however, the Philippines acknowledged for the first time that it intentionally beached the *BRP Sierra Madre* in 1999 to create a permanent government outpost in response to China's occupation of nearby Mischief Reef (Tordesillas 2014a; Quismundo 2014b; Cerojano 2014). It dismissed China's accusation that the grounding of the war-era naval landing ship on the Shoal was a violation of the DOC. Manila's argument stated that the DOC stipulates that parties must refrain from "inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reef, shoals, cays, and other features", however, Filipino troops were stationed and rotated on *BRP Sierra Madre* for three years before the signing of the DOC in 2002 (Emmerson 2014; Quismundo 2014b). Regarding China's charge of attempting to carry out construction work on Second Thomas Shoal, Manila publicly asserted that the Philippines only undertook "rotation of personnel and resupply operations" to Second Thomas Shoal (PHDFA 2014a). However, an anonymous source in the Philippines Navy told *Reuters* that they "only intend to improve the conditions there without plans to expand or build permanent structures" (Keck 2014; *Reuters* 2014a; Diola 2014b), which, according to CSIS analysts, implies that the ships transported more than food, water and new soldiers (Green et al. 2017, 185). Another Filipino security official explained that "those are items for the improvement of the living condition of our troops [and] the habitability of the place" (Fonbuena 2014b).

One day after the blockage, on 10 March, the Philippines resorted to sending a Navy Islander plane to airdrop food and water supplies to the Shoal (Keck 2014). However, it was unable to replace the marines (Poling 2014b, 4). Manila realised that the airdrop was only a temporary measure and that the Philippines needed to send back civilian boats (Keck 2014). A Filipino marine colonel told media on 13 March that the Philippines had a plan in place to return the civilian ships to resupply the marines (Dancel 2014a). Nevertheless, this operation was not carried out until the end of March, with Manila conducting another airdrop to provide food to its personnel at Second Thomas Shoal on 15 March 2014 (Republic of the Philippines 2014a, 63).

The Chinese blockage of Second Thomas Shoal took place exactly three weeks before the 30 March 2014 deadline for the Philippines to submit the Memorial (M. Li and Dylan 2015). After the Philippine vessels were prevented from reaching the *BRP Sierra Madre*, on 18 March 2014, Manila submitted a complaint to the Tribunal concerning "recent actions of China to prevent the rotation and resupply of Philippine personnel stationed at Second Thomas Shoal" (PCA 2016a, 13). In the complaint, Manila stated that "China's conduct seriously aggravates and extends the dispute" (PCA 2015, 18). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei rejected the possibility of accepting or participating in an international arbitration on 26 March. Beijing also advised Manila to "return to the right track of resolving the dispute through negotiation and consultation as soon as possible" and to "stop going any further down the wrong track" (FMPRC 2014f). The next day, China's National Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng remarked at a regular press conference on 27 March 2014 that "the Philippines has insisted on the wrong position and resorted to incessant provocations regarding the Ren'ai Reef issue" and that China would "firmly safeguard" its territorial sovereignty, noting that "while the Philippines' illegal actions are doomed to failure" (Xinhua 2014c).

7.3.3. China's second blockage attempt

In late March 2014, China made a second attempt to block the Philippines' vessels. On 28 March 2014, the Philippines dispatched an auxiliary research ship in the Philippine Navy, operated by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), to resupply Second Thomas Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 189). Philippine officials later explained that the purpose of using such a civilian vessel was "to avoid a confrontation" with the Chinese forces patrolling disputed waters and "to show [China] our intent, which was to re-provision and rotate our personnel, and nothing more" (Ramos 2014). For the mission, the vessel carried not only provisions and a new team of soldiers, but also a group of foreign correspondents and Filipino media representatives (Ramos 2014). On the morning of 29 March, as the BFAR vessel approached Second Thomas Shoal, Chinese Coast Guard vessels appeared. The Chinese ships sent a radio message to the Philippine vessel that they had entered "the sea area under the jurisdiction of China" (Dizon 2014a). The Chinese officer on the Coast Guard cutter ordered the Philippine vessel to "stop immediately [...] all illegal activities and leave" (Castro and Ng 2014), and warned that "you will take full responsibility for the consequences of your action" (AP and AFP 2014). According to reports from foreign journalists, four Chinese vessels encircled Second Thomas Shoal as the Philippine vessel approached, two of which chased the Philippine vessel and tried to block its entry to the Shoal (AP and AFP 2014). Chinese aircraft were also spotted by the reporters (Green et al. 2017, 189; Fonbuena 2014c). One Chinese Coast Guard vessel crossed the Philippine boat's bow twice and another tailed it (AP and AFP 2014). The stand-off lasted for more than one hour until the Philippine vessel steered towards a shallow part of the Shoal, which the Chinese Coast Guard ships were too big to pass through (Castro and Ng 2014; Dizon 2014a; Ramos 2014). The Philippine vessel then reached the *BRP Sierra Madre*. On 29 March, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that denounced the Chinese action and "condemn[ed] the harassment by the Chinese coastguard of our civilian vessels" (AP and AFP 2014), also demanding that China "stop taking actions that threatened Philippine security" (Ramos 2014). The next day, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario announced that the Philippines had submitted a Memorial to the arbitral Tribunal on the disputes in the South China Sea between the Philippines and China. The Memorial contained 4,000 pages of evidence to support the Philippines' case.

After the Philippines' announcement of a successful resupply mission and its submission of the Memorial to the Tribunal the next day, the Chinese Foreign Ministry unceasingly protested against the Philippines' actions over the following weeks. On 29 March, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hong Lei, issued in a written statement declaring that "the Philippines' action was aimed at hyping up the issue" so as to "serve its attempt to illegally occupy [the Shoal]". He stressed that the Philippines' action would not change the reality of China's sovereignty over the Shoal (Castro and Ng 2014), and could not shake China's determination to defend its territory. Beijing clarified that it would "by no means allow the Philippine side to seize [the Shoal] in any form" nor "undermine [the DOC]" (FMPRC 2014g; Xinhua 2014d). Immediately after the Philippine Foreign Secretary's announcement of the submission, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated that it would not accept international arbitration and that the only way to resolve the dispute was through bilateral negotiations (Castro and Ng 2014). A Foreign Ministry spokesman added that "regardless of how the Philippines packages its lawsuit, the direct cause of the dispute between China and the Philippines is the Philippines' illegal occupation of part of the islands in the South China Sea" (Castro and Ng 2014). On 31 March, China accused the Philippines of "deliberately schem[ing] the reporting trip" to Second Thomas Shoal only one day before the submission of the Memorial with the purpose of "further hyping up the issue, building momentum

for its promotion of the international arbitration and serving its attempt to illegal snatch the Ren'ai Reef which is China's territory". China characterised the Philippines' legal move as "a political provocation by abusing international legal means" and again warned Manila "to take the consequences caused by its provocative actions" (FMPRC 2014h). Around the same time, Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin also summoned the Philippine Ambassador to express "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" with the Philippines' submission and to urge the Philippine side to "correct mistakes" (FMPRC 2014i). Also, at a regular press conference on 1 April 2014, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that China would "not sit watching any of the Philippines' provocative actions aimed at snatching [the Shoal]" and blamed the escalation of dispute on what China called "further actions to cement its illegal presence" at the Shoal (FMPRC 2014i). Meanwhile, the Chinese Charge d'Affaires Sun Xiangyang declared in a statement that "what the Philippine side did seriously damaged bilateral relations with China" and that China was "deeply disturbed by and concerned with the consequence of such moves" (AFP 2014c).

China then implemented a propaganda campaign to explain its legal position on the South China Sea and undermine the Philippines' case. On 3 April, China detailed its legal claims in a 12-page position paper, which China published in the major Philippine newspaper, *The Philippine Star*, and uploaded to its Foreign Ministry website (Esmaquel 2014c; 2014d; Orosa 2014). The Chinese media became flooded with anti-Filipino remarks. Whereas most characterised the Philippines' actions of both resupplying the grounded warship and pursuing arbitration as provocative and unreasonable, other commentators proposed more hard-line responses (Diola 2014c; Hua 2014). Some *People's Daily* commentaries condemned the Philippines' actions as "against the international law and the historical truth as well as against morality and basic rules of international relations". The international arbitration tactic was labelled "illegal and unreasonable", as well as "lacking [in] credibility". Most Chinese believed that the Philippines used the presence of foreign reporters to sway public opinion (M. Gao 2014) and "solicit international sympathy" (Xinhua 2014e; M. Gao 2014). Some PLA scholars and retired officials urged the Philippines not to "misjudge China's tolerance". They suggested that "if the language is not enough, it must be coupled with actions" (*People's Daily Online* 2014b; *Global Times* 2014b). A *Global Times* editorial, reposted in the *People's Daily Online*, encouraged the blockage while specifying that "China must establish a clear red line [that] the Philippines cannot cross" and that "China should expand its military, administrative and economic presence in the South China Sea while defying Manila's provocations" (*People's Daily Online* 2014a).

After this episode, there have been no further reports on Chinese coercive behaviours, such as harassment in and around Second Thomas Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 196). However, on 7 April, the Philippines wrote to the Tribunal regarding "China's most recent actions in and around Second Thomas Shoal", expressing concern about "its ability to resupply its personnel" (PCA 2015, 19). Until May 2014, the Philippines still used airdrops to resupply its troops aboard the *BRP Sierra Madre*. While the Philippines was delivering the provisions on 3 May 2014, it spotted five Chinese vessels, including a survey ship, a frigate and three surveillance vessels, close to Second Thomas Shoal (Laude 2014b). In August 2014, it was reported that Chinese Coast Guard vessels regularly maintained presence around Second Thomas Shoal. At least three Chinese Coast Guard missile-firing frigates from Mischief Reef were deployed to guard Second Thomas Shoal (Laude 2014c), which prompted another diplomatic protest from Manila (Avendaño and Balana 2014). Nevertheless, at the end of the year, a Philippine official confirmed that two sea-based re-provision

missions met no interference from Chinese government vessels (Green et al. 2017, 197; M. Santos 2014). In July 2015, Manila admitted that they were conducting repairs and maintenance to prevent the rusty *BRP Sierra Madre* from disintegrating and to improve the living quarters of Filipino soldiers (Nepomuceno 2015; Mogato 2015b).

7.3.4. Outcome: An evaluation

China deployed a flotilla of fishing vessels and government ships to create a new normal of constant presence in the disputed area, but also used a variety of tools to pressure the Philippines over the dispute, deter the Philippines from undertaking planned construction at its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal and compel Manila to stop pursuing the case against China, as well as return to negotiations. However, economic tools, such as sanctions or informal restrictions, such as quarantine tests of agricultural products, which China introduced during the Scarborough Shoal stand-off in 2012, were not used in 2013 and 2014. Instead, China offered a "carrot" to Manila before resuming its maritime coercive diplomacy.

China succeeded in blocking the Philippines' vessels' access to the *BRP Sierra Madre* in early March; however, China failed to achieve its two objectives of coercing the Philippines to abandon its outpost and deterring Manila from carrying out construction work. Under Chinese pressure, the Philippines challenged China's naval blockade by carrying out resupply missions by air and then resuming personnel replacement, as well as supply provision, by sea. Importantly, following this episode, the Philippines was not sufficiently deterred to drop its construction plan. On the contrary, the Philippines undertook repairs and planned construction on the *BRP Sierra Madre* to maintain and reinforce its presence in 2015, thereby re-asserting its claims over the Shoal.

With regard to China's objective of compelling the Philippines to return to the bilateral negotiating table and drop its pursuit of arbitration against China, China's coercive diplomacy also proved to be ineffective. Despite pressure from China, the Philippines submitted the Memorial to the Tribunal on the deadline of 30 March and continued to pursue the case to challenge China's extensive claims in the South China Sea. As Carl Thayer notes, Manila "crossed a significant line here", elaborating that "the pressure to withdraw before actually mounting an argument has been intense but they [the Philippines] have stayed the course" (*GMA News Online* 2014). In July 2016, the Tribunal issued its Award, ruling in favour of the Philippines. The PCA delivered judgment which determined Second Thomas Shoal to be a low-tide elevation and a part of the Philippines' EEZ and continental shelf, thereby refusing any possible Chinese entitlement to any maritime zone in the area of the Shoal (PCA 2016a, 174, 260).

Furthermore, China's decision to increase patrols in and around the Shoal in 2013 and the unprecedented move to block the Philippines' ships in 2014 alerted not just the Philippines but all the other neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia to China's intentions.

7.4. Explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

This section examines the asymmetry of motivation between China and the Philippines, and U.S. reaction to the tensions over Second Thomas Shoal in order to provide an explanation for the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy.

7.4.1. *The asymmetry of motivation*

China's coercive diplomacy failed to induce the Philippines to back down over the rotation of marines stationed at Second Thomas Shoal and the delivery of supplies, or the plan of reinforcing the outpost. Also, China did not apply the 2012 Scarborough Shoal scenario to take de facto control of the Shoal. With regard to China's motivations, Zhou Fangyin (2016, 883) has argued that China's desire to gain exclusive de facto control over the Shoal was not strong enough. Zhou explains that control over Second Thomas Shoal would "afford only a very limited improvement in China's overall strategic position in the South China Sea". Moreover, it would generate widespread anxiety and a sense of hostility towards China among the countries of Southeast Asia, which "would be unfavourable for China's rise" (F. Zhou 2016, 884).

By contrast, the Philippines had more interests at stake. First, the Philippines had stationed personnel long-term on the stranded ship on the Shoal for many years. This presence raised the risks and stakes for both countries. Should Chinese vessels adopt stronger measures or seek to use force against the *BRP Sierra Madre* and the troops stationed there, it might escalate into an armed confrontation. Therefore, the situation at Second Thomas Shoal was different from that in Scarborough Shoal, where the Philippines had not established a permanent presence before the stand-off. Second, Manila attached a great deal of significance to Second Thomas Shoal for their national security. In the meeting with the representative of the Chinese Foreign Ministry to discuss matters related to Second Thomas Shoal on 7 March 2014, the Philippine Embassy highlighted that Second Thomas Shoal is 105 nautical miles from Palawan. He noted that this proximity illustrates the significance of the Shoal to the Philippines' security, and that what transpires in the area so close to the Philippines is of concern to it (Republic of the Philippines 2014c). Third, as a submerged reef, Second Thomas Shoal lies within the Philippines' EEZ, and, under UNCLOS, belongs to the Philippines.

As a result, after the Chinese vessels blocked the Philippines from accessing the *BRP Sierra Madre*, Manila found other means to re-supply its troops. Some experts argued that as long as China maintained the pressure, the Philippines would eventually be forced to withdraw the marines and concede Second Thomas Shoal in the same manner as it conceded Scarborough Shoal (Thayer 2014a). By this argument, in responding to the first blockage by airdropping supplies, Manila conceded to China the right to restrict entry to the area (Thayer 2014a). However, these airdrops, like the Allies' airlifting of supplies to West Berlin in 1948 or the U.S.'s airlifting of fighters to Taiwan in the Quemoy crisis of 1958, manifests a significant determination and, in part, passes back the decision of whether to accept the presence of Filipino military personnel at the Shoal or to escalate to Beijing. The attempt to re-supply forces by sea in late March with U.S. assistance was a clear demonstration that the Philippines was willing to accept a high level of risk to maintain its presence at Second Thomas Shoal (Green et al. 2017, 200; A. Robles 2014). However, the Philippines was careful not to repeat the mistakes of the Scarborough Shoal stand-off in 2012. By using non-military ships to conduct re-supply missions (Ramos 2014), and pursuing the policy of "maximum tolerance" (AP 2014b; AP and AFP 2014), the Philippines provided the Chinese with no pretext for disproportionate retaliatory action, preventing China from taking control over the Shoal. Zhou Fangyin (2016, 883) concluded that although Chinese vessels continued to patrol the waters around the Shoal, China tacitly acknowledged the Philippines' presence instead of striving for exclusive de facto control. Furthermore, after the tensions of 2014, the Philippines proceeded

with "maintenance repairs" on the *BRP Sierra Madre* in 2015 and continued to use it as an outpost for housing marines guarding Second Thomas Shoal (AFP 2015b; Nepomuceno 2015).

Furthermore, despite pressure from China's carrot-and-stick approach, the Philippines filed the Memorial by the deadline set by the Tribunal. Regardless of whether China exerted private or publicly pressure on Manila to drop the arbitration case altogether or postpone filing the Memorial until after the 30 March deadline, the implications of such an action would have been immense for the Philippines' claims over Second Thomas Shoal and other maritime features. Beijing's carrot of a mutual withdrawal from Scarborough Shoal and more investments could not offset Manila's interests at stakes nor reduce Manila's motivation to resist Beijing's demand. It was reported that the Philippine President and his cabinet did discuss China's offer (Esmaque 2014a). However, in an interview with the *New York Times* in early February, he explained that it would be wrong to accept such an offer by rhetorically asking "what guarantee is there that the wrong will not be further exacerbated down the line?" (R. Robles and Ng 2014). Former Philippine Congressman and the President's National Security Adviser Roilo Golez further explained that the deal "[was] not a fair exchange". He claimed that China should be the one to withdraw from the Philippines' EEZ (R. Robles and Ng 2014). Lauro Baja, a retired Philippine diplomat and former President of the UN Security Council, believed that if the Philippines missed the deadline to submit the Memorial, it would "weaken" the Philippines' case because "it means we are not ready", also noting that "the [public] perception will be negative" (R. Robles and Ng 2014). This helps to explain the Philippines' decision to continue with the case and not to submit to Chinese pressure.

7.4.2. U.S. stakes and reaction and China's risk calculation

As Ian Storey, a scholar at Singapore's Institute of South East Asian Studies, notes, tension at Second Thomas Shoal could have proved more dangerous to both sides than the 2012 stand-off at Scarborough Shoal, given the presence of Filipino troops (Mogato 2013). However, the presence of a Philippine Navy ship albeit a grounded one and Philippine marines stationed at Second Thomas Shoal also raised the stakes for Washington (USCC 2014, 247). According to a U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) to Congress report, the U.S. could decide to intervene on behalf of the Philippines, should China use force against the *BRP Sierra Madre* and the marines (USCC 2014, 247). It asserted that the U.S. – Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty could be invoked in the case of an "armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or *on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific* (emphasis added)". The report concludes that the Treaty's application to "armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific is "clearly relevant" to the situation at Second Thomas Shoal (USCC 2014, 247). Other U.S. think-tanks considered Second Thomas Shoal to be one of several possible flashpoints in the South China Sea that could force the U.S. to intervene in defence of its Southeast Asian allies (Glaser 2015b; Glaser and Szalwinski 2013, 5). Therefore, the possibility that the Mutual Defence Treaty could be invoked in the case of Second Thomas Shoal might have served as a deterrent (Avendaño 2014).

After Beijing heightened its presence by maintaining naval and marine surveillance ships in waters around Second Thomas Shoal in early May 2013, the U.S. Senate adopted a Resolution criticising China's behaviours in the South China Sea, including at Second Thomas Shoal in July 2013 (O'Rourke 2014, 58–59; Green et al. 2017, 180; Bacani 2013).

U.S. concern over China's activities and the deteriorating situation at Second Thomas Shoal was made clear by the deployment of its assets and the expansion of military cooperation with the Philippines. On 31 July 2013, the U.S. deployment of a *P-3C Orion* aircraft from Clark Air Base north of Manila to conduct reconnaissance flights over Second Thomas Shoal was confirmed (*The Japan Times* 2013; Yeo and Beckhusen 2013; Green et al. 2017, 180; *Rappler* 2013). According to a Filipino marine stationed on the *BRP Sierra Madre*, the U.S. spy plane "tended to fly over the shoal whenever the Chinese made a significant tactical shift" (Himmelman 2013). The Philippines' Foreign Secretary Rosario stated that this action was part of the U.S. Navy's regular surveillance undertaken to assist Manila's maritime domain awareness under the provisions of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty (*Rappler* 2013; Poling 2014b, 3). Also, in July 2013, just days after the conclusion of the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue, U.S. defence officials and their Filipino counterparts announced that they were negotiating a new agreement to enhance defence cooperation and that upcoming negotiations would provide the U.S. with greater access to Philippine bases (B. Wang 2013; Simon and Baker 2014). China publicly interpreted this as a signal of the U.S.' "support for the Philippine government in territorial disputes with China" (Thayer 2013, 13; B. Wang 2013).

On 13 February 2014, in his visit to the Philippines, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, stated that the U.S. would "help" the Philippines in the event that China occupied disputed islands in the South China Sea (Fonbuena 2014a). This remark was considered as the strongest U.S. declaration of support for Manila (Sutter and Huang 2014a; AFP 2014a) by both the Philippines and senior Chinese diplomats. As former Chinese diplomat, Fu Ying, and Wu Shicun, noted, "this is the toughest stance expressed by the U.S. in the China-Philippine dispute" (Ying and Wu 2016, 29).

Despite these signals, Chinese vessels still carried out a blockade against the Philippines' access to the *BRP Sierra Madre* in March 2014. This leads to the argument that earlier signals from the U.S. did not deter China from resorting to coercion in order to assert their claims and block the Philippines' ships' access to Second Thomas Shoal in the first place. However, it is worth noting that, on various occasions, Beijing called for the Philippines to remove the *BRP Sierra Madre*. In 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made an offer to a Philippine counterpart that the Chinese would "do it themselves" (Tordesillas 2013). Other Chinese officials proposed to apply the "cabbage strategy", once used successfully at Scarborough Shoal, to Second Thomas Shoal. According to this suggestion, China should surround the Shoal in layers using fishing vessels, civilian maritime vessels and navy ships to block all supplies and compel the Filipino marines to abandon the grounded vessel (*China Daily Mail* 2013). Neither of these strategies was ever selected. Fu Ying noted that "the U.S. has made clearer responses to China in the South China Sea, in postures of direct intervention in the disputes and often in favour of other claimants, especially its own allies" (Ying and Wu 2016, 29). The extent of U.S. intervention was accounted for by the Chinese when calculating a "proportional" response to the Philippines' supposed attempt to create a permanent structure at Second Thomas Shoal (You 2013, 8). In other words, U.S. signals and the possibility of invoking the Mutual Defence Treaty over the *BRP Sierra Madre* did play a role in imposing a higher risk on China should it choose to attempt a *fait accompli* in taking control over the Shoal. As Marwyn Samuels highlights, "while China has the military advantage, from a political point of view it's difficult [for China], because of the Americans" (A. Robles 2014).

Three days after China's blockage, the U.S. accused China of raising tensions. Washington stated that it was "troubled" by China's behaviour, characterizing the blockage as "a provocative move" (Mogato 2014). State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki added that "there should be no interference with the efforts of claimants to maintain the status quo" and that "freedom of navigation [...] must be maintained" (Mogato 2014). Perhaps more importantly, in a statement issued by the U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Manila, the U.S. rejected China's claim that Manila was violating the DOC and recognised the right to "regular resupply and rotation of personnel" to locations that have been in place prior to signing. The U.S. stated that such routine activity was "consistent with maintenance of the status quo" (Quismundo 2014a; AFP 2014b). In addition to hard-line statements, only five days after the first blockage by China, the U.S. and the Philippines reached a consensus on U.S. access to several military bases (Bower 2014, 9).

Even though the U.S. military has not directly intervened in any of the confrontations in the South China Sea, it has deployed assets to monitor Chinese activities and signal U.S. interests (Glaser 2014, 57). According to the Philippine Ambassador in Washington, the U.S. assisted the Philippine Navy "in being able to evade the Chinese ships", when the Philippine ship resumed the re-supply mission by sea in late March 2014 (Fonbuena 2014c). The U.S. has also continued to conduct surveillance flights over the Shoal, which became a major element of the emerging U.S. strategy to signal its interests in the region (Dyer and McGregor 2014). A *P-8A Poseidon* – the U.S.' most advanced naval surveillance aircraft – was deployed to Second Thomas Shoal from a former U.S. airbase about 80 km north of Manila (Glaser and Vitello 2015, 24). The aircraft made "low passes" to ensure visibility to the Chinese (Dyer and McGregor 2014; Dizon 2014b). According to a former Pentagon official familiar with the operation, "this is a new dynamic" and "the message is, 'we know what you are doing, your actions will have consequences, and that we have the capacity and the will and we are here'". The U.S.' use of its new generation of *P-8A* planes in contested areas represented an intensification of the activity (Dyer and McGregor 2014). Bonnie Glaser, China expert at the CSIS, said that such surveillance flights showed that the U.S. "has an interest in peaceful resolution of these disputes and opposes China's coercion" (Dyer and McGregor 2014). Following the 29 March re-provision operation, one Chinese Foreign Ministry official claimed that a U.S. Navy vessel was positioned nearby at the time (Glaser 2014, 57).

The Obama administration continued to voice its support of the Philippines. In regard to the Philippines' filing of a case against China, on 30 March 2014 the State Department affirmed its support to the Philippines' submission of the Memorial and stated that the Philippines had the right to avail itself of dispute resolution mechanisms provided by UNCLOS (US DOS 2014a). The next day – the second day in a row that the U.S. expressed support to the Philippines in its dispute with China (Katigbak 2014) – the U.S. State Department accused the Chinese Coast Guard of "harassment", noting its "provocative and destabilising action [that was] inconsistent with freedom of navigation". State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf reiterated that the Philippines' "routine resupply and rotation of personnel" at Second Thomas Shoal was "not a change in the status quo". She also stated that as a "treaty ally" of the Philippines, the U.S. urged China "to refrain from further provocative behavior", "to manage disputes peacefully" and "to clarify its ambiguous claim in accordance with international law" (US DOS 2014b). The U.S.' position and involvement were re-affirmed during a congressional hearing on 3 April 2014, when Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Daniel Russel called China's deployment of a large number of coast guard vessels to the Shoal "problematic" and "intimidating". He added that the Chinese "should be in no doubt about

Washington's resolve to defend its allies if necessary" and that "the Obama administration is firmly committed to honoring our defence commitments to our allies" (Brunnstrom 2014a). In late April 2014, the U.S. and the Philippines signed a 10-year Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). Timed to coincide with President Obama's visit to the Philippines, the Agreement grants American forces rotational access to selected military bases and allows the U.S. to preposition combat aircraft and warships in the Philippines (NIDS 2015, 142; Baviera 2014, 1; Dancel 2014b).

China had concerns over these new developments in U.S.- Philippine defence cooperation, as well as the implications of increasing U.S. involvement. Wang Xiaopeng, China expert in maritime and border studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences highlighted that most of the Philippine military bases that U.S. troops are allowed to access are on the Western side of the country, which faces the South China Sea (J. Yang 2014). Wang also notes that even though the U.S. did not declare that Spratly Islands fall within its military pact with the Philippines, a U.S. military presence in the area would be expected and that Manila would prepare for this (J. Yang 2014). As Manila interpreted the EDCA as a guarantee of U.S. military backing, China believed that these signals from the U.S. would embolden the Philippines (Dancel 2014b).

Changes in China's assessment of risk regarding U.S. involvement became quite notable. In 2013, the Chinese believed that "the U.S. would not turn hostile with China for the sake of the Philippine interests and it may not necessarily provide assistance to the Philippines at the crucial moment" (China Daily 2013). However, in 2014, the signalling of the U.S.' presence and support to the Philippines, to a certain extent, changed the Chinese perspective. On the one hand, China criticised the U.S.' vocal support to the Philippines and considered their statements to contradict the "U.S. commitment of not taking sides on issues of dispute" (FMPRC 2014d). On the other hand, the U.S. was considered to have "connive[d] with the Philippines to suppress China" (People's Daily 2014b), by "provid[ing] large amounts of military and economic aid to support [the Philippines] against China" (Haiwainet 2014). Some Chinese experts even assessed that "there is no doubt that the U.S. has been caught in an 'alliance dilemma', in which the U.S. "must satisfy all kinds of so-called 'reasonable demands' by its allies" (Haiwainet 2014). From a broader perspective, Beijing believed that the U.S. had taken advantage of countries' maritime territorial disputes with China to implement its strategic rebalancing to Asia, establish a new Asia-Pacific security pattern and contain China's influence in the region (Q. Liu 2014), thereby "presenting itself as a security threat to China" (*China Daily* 2014). These concerns have certainly affected China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy to manage the dispute over Second Thomas Shoal.

However, the Philippines also recognised that "the EDCA does not guarantee the U.S. will rush to the aid of the Philippines if an armed conflict with China erupts" (T. Burgonio 2014). Furthermore, in his visit to the Philippines, Obama neither made specific remarks on the South China Sea disputes nor made any "Senkaku-type statement"⁵⁰ (Cossa and Glosserman 2014, 4). The Obama administration also stressed that the EDCA was not aimed at containing China (Dancel 2014b; 2014c). However, this does not mean that both the EDCA and Obama's visit had no deterrent value. At the opening of the Committee's inquiry into the EDCA in December 2014, Philippine Defence Secretary Voltaire Gazmin highlighted that the Agreement "was a deterrent to threats to the country's security". When being asked how effective a deterrent EDCA was,

⁵⁰ Obama asserted in Tokyo that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty covered all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands, which is claimed by China (Cossa and Glosserman 2014, 4)

Secretary Gazmin stressed that "we have not been attacked in our resupply mission to Ayungin Shoal although we had skirmishes, which did not cause a shooting war" and that "EDCA actually serves as a deterrent so that the Chinese won't do what it will do to the Philippines" (T. Burgonio 2014). The rotational presence of U.S. troops in the Philippines provided Manila with a reassurance (Cossa and Glosserman 2014, 4) and by calling U.S. defence commitments "ironclad" in Obama's statement, China was forewarned not to underestimate a U.S. reaction to its growing assertiveness (Baviera 2014, 2). Just days after the signing of the EDCA, the U.S. and Philippine forces undertook two-week joint military exercises (Sidel 2015, 222; *BBC* 2014a).

7.5. Analytical summary

This chapter details China's use of coercive diplomacy in the form of a "gradual turning of the screw" in combination with a tacit ultimatum. China ratcheted up the pressure on the Philippines by increasing its presence in and around the Second Thomas Shoal, and then harassed and blocked the Philippines vessels when they attempted to reach their outpost on the Shoal. Specifically, these controlled pressure tactics of regular maritime patrols and a blockade at Second Thomas Shoal were designed to impose costs on the Philippines' continued efforts to sustain the *BRP Sierra Madre* and retain control over the Shoal (USCC 2014, 246). However, the overarching objectives of China's coercive diplomacy were to coerce the Philippines to withdraw its personnel from, abandon its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal, deter the Philippines from conducting any construction works, and finally compel the Philippines to stop the "hostile act" of pursuing an international arbitration case against China, and instead negotiating with China.

With its increased law enforcement capabilities, Beijing has primarily relied on its paramilitary forces to execute its maritime coercive diplomacy. In order to compel the Philippines to change its policy of pursuing arbitration against China, the Chinese also applied positive inducements. However, China's maritime coercive diplomacy failed to get the Philippines to comply with all three demands. The alleged offer of more investments and a mutual withdrawal from Scarborough Shoal was not sufficient to create an asymmetry of motivation in China's favour. The offer failed to reduce Manila's motivation to file the Memorial due to the government's concerns about the credibility of China's offer, which arrived via a backdoor channel (Esmaguel 2014a), as well as its fairness. Manila also considered the implications of such action on its broader claims in the South China Sea and on the case. The relative motivation of the two sides was therefore fixed in favour of the Philippines because of the proximity of Second Thomas Shoal to Palawan, the presence of Filipino marines on the Shoal and its rights over the Shoal under UNCLOS. In other words, the Philippines was more motivated than China to retain the Second Thomas Shoal.

Another factor that caused China's maritime coercive diplomacy to be ineffective was the U.S.' strong reaction and counter-coercion signals, which were lacking in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off. Examination of the U.S. reaction during the 2014 tensions over Second Thomas Shoal supports the consensus that the extent to which dominant power interests were engaged in the issue and their support for small countries were key factors (Kagan 1998, 113–14; Khong 1998, 129–30). With direct assistance provided, the Philippine vessels could resume their re-supply missions, such that the U.S. helped the Philippines to challenge China's naval blockade. Furthermore, the U.S.' hard-line statements, support for its Southeast Asian ally's pursuit of arbitration and the show

of force provided by surveillance flights over the Shoal, as well as moves taken to strengthen its alliance with the Philippines, had significant deterrent effects on China.

Chapter 8

The HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, 2014

This chapter analyses the oil rig crisis of 2014, in which China attempted to coerce Vietnam by deploying its ultradeep-water HYSY 981 oil rig to the area Vietnam claimed as its EEZ and continental shelf for two and a half months. First, it provides some background on the dispute between China and Vietnam over the Paracel Islands and tensions caused by oil and natural gas exploration activities undertaken by China in the contested waters before the crisis. It then examines China's objectives and analyses Chinese maritime coercion through five separate phases so as to highlight the tools and tactics employed to pressure Vietnam during the crisis. The chapter then evaluates the extent to which China succeeded or failed to achieve its objectives. The last section of the chapter examines the situational and tactical factors that explain the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

8.1. Background

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Paracel Islands are claimed by Vietnam, the PRC and Taiwan, but have been under the PRC's control since 1974. The PRC claims the Paracels on the basis of being the first to discover, develop, exploit and exercises jurisdiction over the Islands (FMPRC 2014p). Vietnam, on the other hand, argues that it established its sovereignty over the Paracels when the islands were terra nullius (VNA 2014b) and has exercised effective and actual administration over the archipelago (VNMOFA 2014d).

The Paracels is a group of approximately 30 small islands, rocks, reefs and sandbanks (NGIA 2017, 9–11; H. S. Vu 1995; H. D. Vu 2014, 37). The largest features of the Paracels are Woody Island (about 0.8 square miles), Lincoln Island (0.6 square miles), Triton Island (0.5 square miles), and Pattle Island (about 0.1 square miles). The most southwestern land feature in the Paracels is Triton Island (known as Zhongjian Island in Chinese). As mentioned in Chapter Four, in 1996, China drew archipelagic straight baselines around the entire Paracel Islands. Despite the fact that according to many specialists this application of a straight baseline system does not conform to the UNCLOS,⁵¹ China claims from such baselines a 200-nautical-mile-EEZ on the basis of the 1998 PRC Law on the EEZ and Continental Shelf. Within this EEZ, it claims that it the sole right to exploit any maritime resources (Zou and Liu 2015, 59; E. Wong 2014; Green et al. 2017, 204).

⁵¹ According to a 1996 report from the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, China would not be allowed to establish straight archipelagic baselines around the Paracel Islands, because China is a continental, and not an archipelagic, state. According to the UNCLOS, an archipelagic state refers to "a State constituted wholly by one or more archipelagoes and may include other islands". An archipelago is defined as "a group of islands, including parts of islands, interconnecting waters and other natural features form an intrinsic geographic, economic and political entity, or which historically have been regarded as such". As continental states, China (and even Vietnam) cannot establish straight archipelagic baselines around islands belonging to them. See: (Smith 1996; Beckman 2013, 160–61)

Since the mid-2000s, China has undertaken a number of hydrocarbon exploration activities around the Paracels, which have provoked protests from Vietnam. According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2006 China conducted a 2D seismic survey near Triton Island using the vessel *Fen Dou 4* and Vietnamese law enforcement vessels "took preventive measures" to confront the Chinese seismic survey ship. One year later, China was conducting 3D seismic surveys with the cooperation of Western Geco in an area west of the Paracels when Hanoi sent 30 naval auxiliary ships to disrupt the survey activities. Also, between 2007 and 2008, China leased a Swiss offshore drilling company – TransOcean – to carry out drilling activities in Paracel areas but Vietnamese opposition forced TransOcean to cancel the contract. From June to August 2010, China signed contract with Western Spirit to conduct 3D seismic surveys in Vietnam's oil Blocks 141–143 near Triton Island. In the same areas, the Chinese research vessel – the *Tanbaohao* – conducted survey activities from June to July 2011, which led to an effort by the Vietnamese law enforcement vessels to drive this vessel away (Green et al. 2017, 204; VNMOFA 2014g). In June 2012, Hanoi passed the Law of the Sea of Vietnam, which reiterated Vietnam's claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Shortly afterwards, China's State Council approved the establishment of the prefectural-level Sansha City on Woody Island to administer the Paracel, Spratly, and Zhongsha Islands. Furthermore, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) opened nine offshore blocks for joint operation with foreign companies. The fact that these blocks deeply lie on Vietnam's continental shelf and overlap with PetroVietnam's oil Blocks 128–132 and 145–156 triggered strong reactions from Vietnam, made through a series of public statements (Q. Koh 2012). From May to June 2013, Beijing again conducted seismic surveys again near the Paracels (Green et al. 2017, 204).

China made an unprecedented move on 1 May 2014 when unilaterally placing its giant oil rig HYSY 981 for deep-sea drilling for the first time in the waters south of the Paracel Islands and just 120 nautical miles from Vietnam's coast. To protect the rig, China dispatched a large flotilla of fishing boats, coast guard and military vessels, and aircraft. Thousands of deliberate rammings occurred between Chinese and Vietnam vessels during a seventy-five-day stand-off. The incident provoked large-scale anti-China protests and riots in Vietnam and triggered a major diplomatic crisis, which ended when Beijing decided to withdraw the oil rig a month ahead of schedule, on 15 July.

8.2. The drivers behind China's maritime coercive diplomacy

In most of the incidents between China and its neighbours in the South China Sea, China has often blamed its counterpart for making the first move, claiming that China simply reacted to what it perceived as a provocative action from rival claimants. However, most of the observers concluded that the oil-rig deployment was unprovoked (ICG 2015, 4; Thayer 2016a, 212; F. Zhang 2016, 103; Storey 2014, 3). Before the oil rig crisis, "there was no palpable provocation by Vietnam that could justify China's actions" (Thayer 2016a, 212). On the contrary, since the 2011 cable-cutting incidents, Vietnam had been attempting to reduce tensions between the two countries. Vietnamese and Chinese leaders had signed the Agreement on Basic Principles Guiding the Settlement of Sea Issues in October that year (Bradsher 2014). Several hot lines to defuse territorial disputes were established during visits of the two countries' leaders throughout 2013 (*Bloomberg News* 2013). Therefore, the timing of the HYSY 981 deployment was surprising, even for the Vietnamese side.

Some have argued that China's action was prompted by a desire to secure access to oil. However, when asked about probable hydrocarbon reserves in the area where the HYSY 981 was operating, Do Van Hau, General Director of PetroVietnam, told reporters that there had been no commercial discovery of oil and gas in that area and that it was the first time an oil drilling exploration activity had been conducted there. PetroVietnam had conducted surveys in the region before but it had not yet drilled (*Dan Tri* 2014; *Thanhniên News* 2014a). A senior CNOOC official revealed that they were ordered to place the rig in Block 143 despite their reservations on commercial grounds, pointing to the costs of keeping the rig on station until mid-August, as initially scheduled (Thayer 2014b). Feng Zhang (2016, 104) also indicated that the practical benefits of energy resources in that area were limited. The HYSY 981 oil rig dug only two wells during its operations, which were insufficient for producing a stable oil supply (F. Zhang 2016, 104). Analysts have also noted that "even if the HYSY 981 had made a significant discovery, the commercial viability of that discovery hinges on getting the product to market" (Manicom 2014, 10). Given the fact that the costs increase with distance and the technological challenges associated with laying pipelines in deep water, Vietnam is the most sensible market for the product. However, But it would be inconceivable for Hanoi to pay China for resources it views as its own (Downs 2014, 7; Manicom 2014, 10). Therefore, the nature of the drilling rig's operation was not commercial.

Instead, the deployment of HYSY 981 was a political manoeuvre. According to Erica Downs, of the Brookings Institution, and Taylor Fravel, at the MIT, the placement of the oil rig in that specific location was consistent with a series of actions taken by Chinese actors in recent years to assert and exercise China's jurisdiction over parts of the South China Sea it claims (Downs 2014, 7; E. Wong 2014).

However, such moves required the development of China's maritime capabilities, including offshore rig technology. In 2011, CNOOC, China's biggest marine oil producer, unveiled its first homemade ultradeep-water drilling rig – the HYSY 981. This was the first example of a sixth generation of deep-water oil rigs being designed and manufactured in China (G. Li 2015). The rig reportedly extended China's deep-water drilling capability from 300 to 3,000 metres (Xinhua 2012g). At the time, it was China's largest oil drilling platform. Owned by CNOOC and operated by a CNOOC subsidiary – China Oilfield Services Limited (COSL), the rig officially drilled its first well in the South China Sea in an area 198 nautical miles from Hong Kong in May 2012 (Y. Zhou 2012). However, it spent part of 2013 being repaired. COSL then allocated 62 percent of its capital to acquiring new rigs in 2013 (Manicom 2014, 9). The second oil rig deployed in undelimited waters between China and Vietnam in June 2014 was the *Nanhai 09*, which was described by CNOOC as the second largest in the company's fleet of rigs (Panda 2014b). The HYSY 981 and the *Nanhai 09* were their only two large semi-submersibles at the time, possessing a gross tonnage of around 21,000 (Yep 2014).

When the HYSY 981 oil rig was first launched, Liu Feng, from the National Institute of South China Sea Studies in Haikou, suggested that "with Chinese drilling technology improving, it is just a matter of time before CNOOC pushes into the central and southern sectors of the South China Sea" (Manicom 2014, 9). Senior Captain Li Jie, a researcher at the Military Academic Research Institute under the PLA, argued that the significance of the HYSY 981 oil rig lay in its potential to "drastically change [China's] passive approach" and that China should change its policy to "mutually combine unilateral development and joint development" (Jie Li 2011; Masuda

2014, 65). CNOOC Chairman Wang Yilin described the HYSY 981 as "mobile national territory", which would help ensure China's energy security, promote the country's maritime power strategy and safeguard Chinese maritime sovereignty (Xinhua 2012g; Jingji Ribao 2012). Zhao Ying, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, characterised the HYSY 981 as "strategically important" because "[t]he value of the South China Sea natural resources is immense" and now "technologies are available for China to tap resources there". He also stressed that Chinese efforts to "deter foreign illegal explorations" would become "meaningful and necessary" (*Global Times* 2011a).

Chen Dingding, of Jinan University in Guangzhou, argues that China's decision to deploy the HYSY 981 oil rig "should not be a surprise or a puzzle", since China has spent a great amount of time and money to develop such an oil rig capable of operating in deep seas. It therefore should be clear that someday China will place it near deep sea areas, which will certainly be contested by other countries (D. Chen 2014). As James Manicom (2014, 10) notes, China is now more capable than ever at exploiting disputed maritime areas. According to Manicom (2014, 8), the move of stationing the HYSY 981 in Vietnam's claimed EEZ "was not a sudden decision" and China deployed the HYSY 981 when it did "because it was when it could".

Given the fact that China's action was not provoked by Vietnam, it could be argued that with the increased material capabilities, especially in deep-water drilling technology, China made use of its advantage to assert its claims of sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and to compel Vietnam to accept the operations of the HYSY 981, thereby accepting China's jurisdiction over the waters it claims in the South China Sea.

8.3. China's maritime coercive diplomacy during the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis

This section analyses China's maritime coercive diplomacy in its deployment of HYSY 981 drilling oil rig in Vietnam's claimed EEZ from 1 May to 15 July 2014. Five phases of Chinese coercion are examined: the first phase is from 1 to 10 May, the second from 10 May to 26 May, the third from 26 May to 17 June, the fourth from 18 June to 14 July and, finally, the withdrawal of the oil rig on 15 July. By examining Chinese maritime coercion in detail, the section highlights how China used maritime coercion and the extent to which China achieved its political objectives through the deployment of the HYSY 981 oil rig.

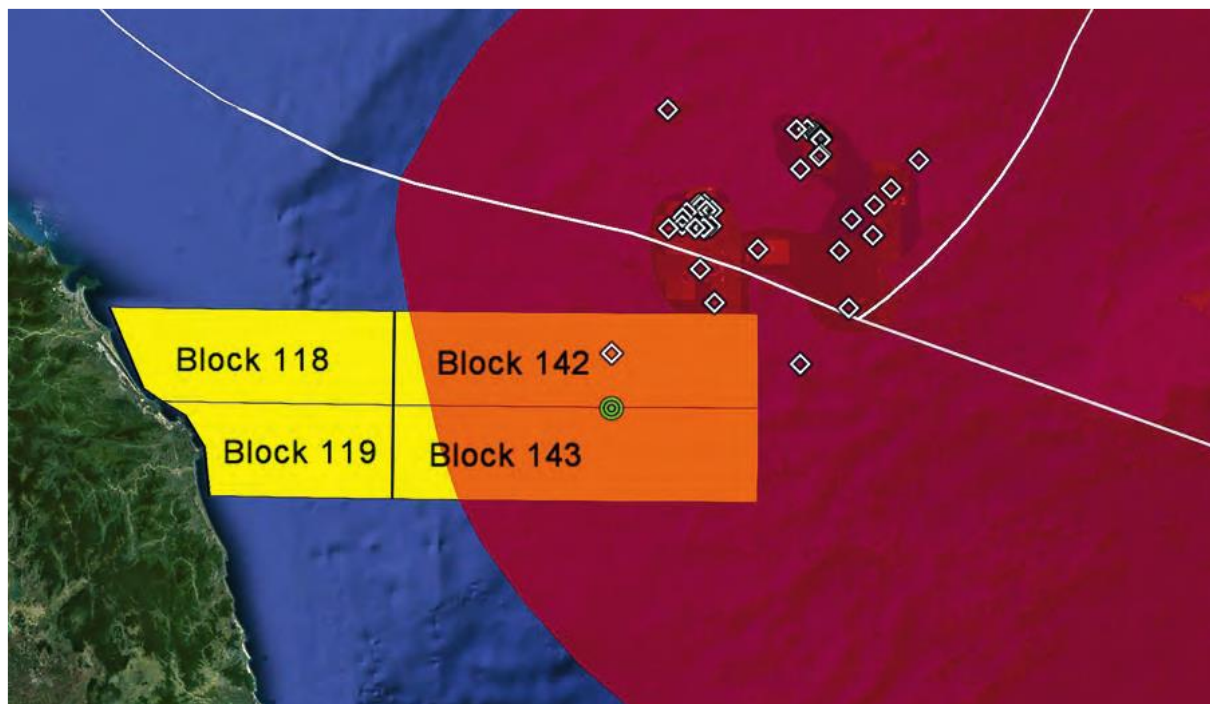


Figure 7: **The location of the HYSY 981 oil rig**

Source: Green, Michael, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas. *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*. London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p.208.

Note: The green dot represents the location of the HYSY 981 oil rig; the white line is the hypothetical equidistant line between China's Hainan Island and mainland Vietnam; the square dots are the Paracels' features; and the red area is China's claimed EEZ, based on straight baselines around the Paracels.

8.3.1. *The first phase: China's deployment of the HYSY 981 oil rig, 1–10 May*

In the early morning of 1 May 2014, Vietnamese maritime authorities detected the presence of the HYSY 981 and three Chinese oil and gas service ships moving southward from the Northwest of the Paracel's Triton Island. The following day, HYSY 981 was floated to a location 17.3 nautical miles from Triton Island, about 130 nautical miles from Vietnam's coast, and approximately 180 nautical miles from China's Hainan Island (VNMOFA 2014c). The oil rig straddled two of PetroVietnam's oil and gas Blocks: 142 and 143. The same day, the Chinese Maritime Safety Administration released Navigation Notice 14033, announcing that the rig would conduct exploratory drilling from 2 May to 15 August and that all ships were prohibited from entering a one-nautical-mile-radius zone around the HYSY 981 (MSA 2014b).

China rapidly increased the number of escort vessels to protect the oil rig and its operations, which provoked an intense stand-off with Vietnamese ships. According to Vietnam's Coast Guard, the number of Chinese escorts, which included marine police, CMS, FLEC, transport and fishing vessels, rose to 40 ships by 3 May and to 50 by 5 May (*Vietnamnet* 2014a; H. Pham and Hoang 2014; *VTC News* 2014). However, Vietnam resisted to China's intimidation. After China

positioned the oil rig on 2 May, Vietnam immediately dispatched deployed vessels from Coast Guard and Fisheries Surveillance Forces to intercept the HYSY 981. According to China, Vietnam dispatched six vessels to the scene. According to the Vice Commander of Vietnam's Coast Guard, Ngo Ngoc Thu, by 7 May the HYSY 981 was being escorted by an armada of at least 60 vessels. This number then rose further to a peak of 80 vessels, including seven PLAN warships. In addition, China dispatched dozens of planes to conduct daily flights over the area (VNMOFA 2014b; *Bao Moi* 2014; *Nguoi Lao Dong* 2014a; Tuoitre 2014a). On 8 May, the Vietnamese Coast Guard detected two Chinese patrol boats and a rocket escort ship in the area around the oil rig (*Vietnamnet* 2014a). Also, according to Commander Thu, all armed Chinese ships had unsheathed their deck guns, demonstrating that "they [were] ready to be used at any time" (*Dan Tri* 2014; *Tuoitre Online* 2014).

Tensions rose rapidly when Hanoi accused Chinese vessels of "intentionally" ramming and "aggressively" firing high-powered water cannon at Vietnamese Coast Guard and Fisheries Surveillance Force vessels, causing damage and injuring crew members (VNMOFA 2014b; *Tuoitre Online* 2014; P. L. Nguyen and Martina 2014). China claimed that from 3 to 7 May, Vietnam had dispatched 36 vessels which had rammed Chinese vessels for 171 times (Xinhua 2014h). On 4 May and 9 May, China officially expanded the radius of its protected zone around the oil rig to three nautical miles and then to five, respectively, and re-stated that any entry into this zone around HYSY 981 was prohibited (MSA 2014a; Green et al. 2017, 213).

At the scene, Vietnam acted with restraint. Unlike China, Hanoi did not send any navy ships to areas around the oil rig (AP 2014d). At the first international press conference regarding the oil rig deployment on 7 May, Vietnamese officials confirmed that the Navy had not taken part in and had not made any presence at the site of the HYSY 981 oil rig (*Tuoitre Online* 2014). According to Do Thanh Hai (2016b, 202), the Vietnam People's Army Navy kept its warships either onshore or away from the area to avoid escalation.

On the diplomatic front, China summoned Vietnam's Ambassador in Beijing to protest Vietnam's actions on 2 May, and two days later, China's Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin called Deputy Foreign Minister and Chief of the Vietnamese Government negotiation delegation on border and territory, Ho Xuan Son, on phone (Xinhua 2014f). On 6 May, Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi also had a phone conversation with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister cum Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh. The Chinese Foreign Ministry published the Chinese position, as emphasised by Yang Jiechi in this conversation, on its website. Accordingly, he maintained that the activities of the Chinese companies in the Parcel Islands were within the mandate of China's sovereignty, sovereign rights and administration. Yang claimed that the "Xisha Islands are part of China's inherent territory and there exists no dispute about it". He criticised Vietnam for harassing Chinese companies' "normal activities" and "damag[ing] the sound momentum of the improvement and development of China-Vietnam relations" (FMPRC 2014j). Yang also warned that "China is strongly dissatisfied and absolutely opposes to Vietnam's interference" and urged the Vietnamese side to "immediately stop the relevant actions of interference, correct its mistakes and take practical actions to maintain the overall situation of the bilateral relations" (FMPRC 2014j; Xinhua 2014f).

From the outset, Vietnam strongly protested China's move, but made efforts to establish

communications with Beijing, as Vietnam's Ministry of Defence communicated with a Military Attaché of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi. Meanwhile, the Chief Executive Officer of PetroVietnam contacted his Chinese counterpart at CNOOC via letter (VNMOFA 2014c). On 4 May, representatives from Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Chargé d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi to hand over a *Note Verbale* protesting against their actions (VNMOFA 2014c; VNA 2014a). The note underlined that the location that the drilling rig and escorting vessels operate was "undeniably" within Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf, and affirmed that their activities seriously infringed upon Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Paracels, EEZ and continental shelf, violated agreements reached by the two countries' leaders and contravened the spirit and wording of the DOC (VNMOFA 2014c). The note also demanded that China "immediately withdraw the drilling rig, vessels, equipment and personnel", "prevent the recurrence of similar acts" and respect Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratlys (VNA 2014a; VNMOFA 2014c). In a 5 May statement, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Le Hai Binh called the presence of the Chinese oil rig off the coast of Vietnam as "illegal and invalid" (LaGrone 2014; P. L. Nguyen 2014). In a conversation with Yang Jiechi, Vietnamese Foreign Minister stressed that China's unilateral placement of the rig and the presence of a large number of vessels, including military ships, on Vietnam's continental shelf was illegal and ran counter to international law and practice (VNA 2014a). He again demanded that China completely withdraw the drilling rig and escort vessels, and hold talks to settle differences around the issue. Foreign Minister Minh added that Vietnam opposed China's act and that Vietnam would "take all suitable and necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests" (VNA 2014a).

Despite this, Vietnam generally adopted a conciliatory diplomatic approach (Thayer 2014d). According to Hanoi, by 7 May, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had made eight communications with China both in Hanoi and Beijing (VNMOFA 2014c). The 4 May *Note Verbale* to the Chinese Foreign Ministry also emphasised that "Vietnam highly values its friendship, cooperation and comprehensive strategic partnership with China and is therefore willing to settle all the disputes and differences at sea between the two countries through bilateral negotiation mechanisms" (Tuoitre 2014a). In fact, Vietnam actively and repeatedly called for discussions with China (Thayer 2014c). Hanoi immediately requested the activation of a hot line between senior leaders (Thayer 2014d). Furthermore, although Hanoi hinted at taking the dispute to international arbitration, Tran Duy Hai, Vice Chairman of the Vietnam National Boundary Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasised that "among peaceful measures, we prioritise negotiation" on 7 May (*Tuoiitre Online* 2014).

In response, on 7 May, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying repeated that the operations of the HYSY 981 were "lawful in China's territorial waters", and were "nothing to do with Vietnam" (Xinhua 2014g). On 8 May, Yi Xianliang, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of China's Foreign Ministry held a press briefing with Li Yong, Chief Executive Officer of COSL on China's drilling operations. Yi Xianliang explained that the drilling was "completely within waters off China's Xisha Islands" and accused Vietnam of disrupting the Chinese company's drilling operation. Yi also echoed Yang's statement by stating that Vietnam's activities caused "unnecessary troubles" for China-Vietnam relations, but emphasised that China had no choice but to take more security measures (Xinhua 2014h; Blanchard and Nguyen 2014a). He also added that China was willing to try and resolve the issue

with Vietnam via talks, but that Hanoi must first remove its vessels from the area (Blanchard and Nguyen 2014a).

However, in contrast to previous tensions at sea, during which Chinese authorities generally appeared to tolerate strongly-worded editorials and allow nationalist outrage in order to increase leverage over rival claimants in the disputes, the official line during the first phase of the oil rig crisis played down China's assertive actions in the South China Sea (Chubb 2014, 14). An editorial published on 6 May under the headline *China Should Show Firm Attitude to Hanoi* was later removed from the website of the *Global Times* English edition (Global Times 2014c). On 7 May, Beijing issued an order to the media instructing that "[a]ll websites must continue to find and delete coverage of 'the collision of Vietnamese naval ships and Chinese oil exploration vessels' and 'confrontation between a large number of Chinese and Vietnamese coast guard boats'. Immediately report on work progress" (*China Digital Times* 2014a). Two days later, when the stand-off eventually began to be reported in the Chinese media, coverage was dominated by Yi Xianliang's remarks (Chubb 2014, 14). Andrew Chubb (2014, 14) noted that by limiting public participation in the issue, Beijing maximised its ability to control the escalation of the situation.

8.3.2. *The second phase: Oil drilling operations, 10–26 May*

The stand-off became more intense when China expanded the radius of the protecting zone for the third time – to some 10 to 15 nautical miles (*The Straits Times* 2014) – and continued to strengthen its armada in order to block Vietnam's access to the rig. On 11 May, Vietnam claimed that China dispatched fighter jets to the scene. According to Ngo Ngoc Thu, two groups of Chinese military aircraft flew over the Vietnamese Coast Guard fleet (*The Straits Times* 2014). On 13 May, 86 Chinese ships, including military vessels and one anti-submarine ship, were present on the site of the HYSY 981 oil rig (T. K. Vu 2014; *Tuoi Tre News* 2014a). It was also reported that a Chinese missile frigate had moved from a site close to the drilling rig to approach and threaten Vietnamese Coast Guard ships for the first time (*Tuoi Tre News* 2014b). The following day, two Chinese amphibious transport ships, equipped with eight surface-to-air missile launchers, were spotted (*Tuoi Tre News* 2014c). According to Hanoi, the HYSY 981 oil rig appeared to be deploying its drilling equipment to begin the drilling process during this time (T. K. Vu 2014).

As the situation escalated, the Chinese adopted an approach that Carl Thayer labelled "diplomatic hardball" as they rebuffed all Vietnamese attempts to open up bilateral channels of communications between the relevant ministries and agencies (Thayer 2014g). On 12 May, diplomats in Beijing told the *New York Times* that they knew of no substantive talks between China and Vietnam (Bradsher 2014). Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Ho Xuan Son was dispatched to Beijing on 13 May to arrange for the visit of a special envoy to discuss the crisis (Thayer 2015a, 10). According to reports, Hanoi also proposed a direct talk between the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), Nguyen Phu Trong, or Vietnamese President, Truong Tan Sang, with Chinese President Xi Jinping. However, China rejected these proposals (Bradsher 2014; Shoji 2014, 1).

On 10 May, while violent confrontations between Chinese vessels and Vietnamese ships were taking place at sea, Vietnamese citizens took to the streets in anti-China demonstrations. These protests then turned into violence on 13 May. Rioters targeted hundreds of foreign-owned factories, which they believed were owned by Chinese companies (Green et al. 2017, 216). On 15

May, hundreds of people were reportedly injured and up to 21 people were killed, including Chinese workers (Hodal and Kaiman 2014).

Following the onset of violence in Vietnam, the Chinese government continued to be careful to avoid provoking a strong anti-Vietnamese response from its own public (Chubb 2014, 16–17). On 14 May, a censorship directive instructed media not to report any news related to "Chinese-funded enterprises in Vietnam being attacked by Vietnamese" and not to republish foreign coverage, but also to find and delete related news, commentaries, and images on interactive platforms (*China Digital Times* 2014b). Another directive was issued on 15 May to China's online media demanding the sole use of Xinhua wire copy and information from the Foreign Ministry's official website when reporting on the riots and the situation of Chinese firms in Vietnam (*China Digital Times* 2014c). When the Chinese authorities did allow a discussion on the issue, reports and articles did not make a clear connection between the deployment of HYSY 981 and the subsequent collisions and rammings or the rioting in Vietnam (Chubb 2014, 14; Loher 2017, 285). Some experts indicate that China apparently wanted to position the deployment of HYSY 981 as a legitimate act, whilst framing the boat collisions and the rioting as provocative and "irrational" moves by Vietnam (Y. Zhang 2014a; Xinhua 2014j; Loher 2017, 285). At a news briefing on 15 May, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying stated that the violence targeting Chinese had "a direct link with the Vietnamese government's indulgence and connivance toward domestic anti-China forces and lawbreakers" (Y. Zhang 2014a). Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Vietnamese counterpart, Pham Binh Minh, in a call on 15 May night that "Vietnam bears unshirkable responsibility for the violent attacks against Chinese companies and nationals" and demanded that Vietnam take "resolute and effective measures to stop all violence" (Buckley and Doan 2014; *Reuters* 2014c). On 16 May, the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that "the Chinese government pays attention to and expresses serious concern about the violence in Vietnam", while the Chinese Ministry of Commerce declared that "Vietnam must ensure such incidents never happen again and take concrete action to repair economic and trade cooperation" (Y. Zhang 2014b).

Over the following days, it was reported that the PLA had shipped war materiel to a town bordering Vietnam in the province of Guangxi on 16 and 17 May (Philipp 2014).⁵² Rumours circled that Yunan had raised the alert level to combat readiness; however, this was denied by the PLA (Huanqiu 2014b). At sea, while Beijing reported that there were now over 60 Vietnamese vessels at the scene (Xinhua 2014i), the Vietnam Fisheries Surveillance Force claimed that the number of Chinese vessels had surged from 90 vessels on 14 May to as many as 126 vessels on 16 May, including four military vessels (VNMOFA 2014a; *Vnexpress* 2014a; *Bao Phap Luat* 2014). The next day, the number of Chinese government ships rose to 136 and China also added one more military vessel to its armada (*Nguoi Lao Dong* 2014c). China maintained this number of vessels at the site from 18 to 21 May (VNMOFA 2014a). In addition, Vietnam claimed that hundreds of steel-hulled Chinese fishing boats had been sent to the site. According to Vietnam, these fishing boats did not engage in commercial fishing activities but instead prevented, threatened and even rammed Vietnamese fishing boats (VNMOFA 2014h; *Tuoitre News* 2014d; *Vietnamnet* 2014b; *Nguoi Lao Dong* 2014b; Green et al. 2017, 218). On 26 May, around forty Chinese fishing vessels

⁵² This was reported by Hong Kong's *Oriental Daily* and mentioned in (*BBC Worldwide Monitoring* 2014). A senior official from Lang Son province confirmed that the Chinese side did move troops and materiel during the oil rig crisis at sea in an interview conducted in October 2016 with the author.

reportedly surrounded a small group of Vietnamese fishing boats before ramming and sinking a Vietnamese fishing boat with ten fishermen on board 17 nautical miles from the HYSY 981 (P. L. Nguyen and Wee 2014; *Vnexpress* 2014b). At the time, Vietnamese officers reported that China Coast Guard vessels were still enforcing their defensive perimeter up to 12 nautical miles from the rig (Green et al. 2017, 220).

China also applied other diplomatic and economic measures to pressure Vietnam. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry on 18 May, some of bilateral exchange plans were suspended, and on 22 May, China sent a position paper to the UN Secretary-General to counter Vietnam's efforts to internationalise the dispute (PRC UNPM 2014a). Furthermore, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that China had raised the travel warning level to Chinese citizens, advising them "not to go to Vietnam for the time being" and had warned that China would "consider taking further steps depending on how the situation plays out" (FMPRC 2014l; 2014m). The travel warning resulted in widespread cancellations of tour packages to Vietnam and suspensions of flights. According to one report, one low-cost carrier suspended all charter flights from Shanghai to Vietnam for about a month. Bookings from China with Vietnam Airlines dropped by up to 90 percent after the warning, and many of its regularly scheduled flights to Vietnam were cancelled (Deng and Geng 2014; Ives 2014).

While the impasse over the oil rig continued, Vietnamese leaders took unprecedented and strong measures to ensure that China's hard line policy would be as costly as possible (Do 2016a). Domestically, Vietnam authorities, while generally reluctant to permit demonstrations, allowed anti-China protests to take place in large size in several major Vietnamese cities, suggesting that Hanoi considered them as means to pressure China and increase its leverage in the dispute. This period saw one of the country's largest ever anti-China demonstrations in Hanoi (*The Straits Times* 2014). Li Jinming, a Professor of maritime law and South China Sea studies at China's Xiamen University, assessed that "Vietnam is challenging China on two fronts – public protests and maritime confrontations around the oil rig" (Y. Zhang 2014b). On 22 May, Vietnam's National Assembly issued a rare public statement condemning China's placement of the rig (Poling 2014b, 5).

Assessing that international voices played an important role in preventing China's new acts of escalating tensions, Vietnam invested a great deal of efforts in the internationalisation of the disputes (*Nhandan Online* 2014). Vietnam's government took the rare step of permitting journalists from the state-controlled news media to cover the protests (Ives and Fuller 2014). In addition, Hanoi organised a public relations campaign around criticism of China's maritime coercive diplomacy and sought to pressure China into ending its oil exploration operations through international press conferences (Do 2016b, 203). At one press conference, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed footage and distributed photos of some incidents (Blanchard and Nguyen 2014a). Furthermore, while attending the 24th ASEAN Summit in Myanmar, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung accused China of "dangerous and serious violations" and added that Chinese actions directly endangered peace, stability, security and marine safety (Ives and Fuller 2014). This was his strongest statement since China's towing of the HYSY 981 into the waters off the coast of Vietnam (Ives and Fuller 2014; Francisco and Mogato 2014). During his visit to the Philippines on 21 May, Prime Minister Dung stated that the two sides were "determined to oppose China's violations". He called on countries and the international

community to "continue strongly condemning China and demanding China to immediately end its violations" (AP 2014f; Mogato and Ruwitch 2014). Carl Thayer analyses that "it's unprecedented for Vietnam to join a U.S. ally and appeal directly for international support" (Mogato and Ruwitch 2014).

Furthermore, Hanoi made several attempts to seek closer ties with the U.S. On 20 May, Hanoi announced it would join the U.S.-supported Proliferation Security Initiative. According to Carl Thayer (2014c), this would provide an opportunity for the United States to assist Vietnam in developing its capacity to conduct surveillance of its maritime zone of responsibility. This had been a longstanding U.S. request, so the timing suggested Vietnam's acceptance was a deliberate opening to Washington (Hayton 2015, 15). On May 21, Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh took the unprecedented step of discussing the situation by telephone with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Minh affirmed Vietnam's willingness to coordinate with the U.S. in implementing concrete measures to further develop the comprehensive partnership between the two countries (Thayer 2014f; VOV 2014).

On the other hand, Hanoi pursued a balanced approach, practicing restraint. At the Singapore Shangri-La Dialogue at the end of May, the Vietnamese Defence Minister, Phung Quang Thanh, downplayed the crisis, comparing it to an internal family spat (Thayer 2015a, 10). He also said that the legal option was considered as an "undesirable option" and as "last resort" (C. H. Chua 2014). In addition, on 21 May 2014, Hanoi deferred Secretary Kerry's invitation for Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to visit Washington over concerns that it might be "too sensitive" at that time (Thayer 2014f).

8.3.3. *The third phase: 27 May–18 June escalation*

On 27 May 2014, the rig was towed to a new location around 22 nautical miles to the east-Northeast of the previous site. On the same day, the Chinese Maritime Safety Administration announced that the HYSY 981 would undertake the second phase of its drilling operations from then until 15 August, and that no foreign ships would be allowed within a three-nautical-mile-radius of the oil rig (*People's Daily Online* 2014c). After some minor relocations, on 5 June the oil rig generally settled at a location, which Vietnam claimed was still deep within its EEZ and continental shelf. The Vietnamese therefore considered this to be a "dangerous move" of escalating tension by China (*Nhandan Online* 2014).

China continued to send a large number of escort ships to the site of the HYSY 981 oil rig in an intimidating manner (Thayer 2014d). On 29 May, Vietnam reported that, not including a large number of steel-hulled fishing boats, China was maintaining a flotilla of approximately 120 ships around the HYSY 981, including 36 Marine Police vessels, 14 freighters and 17 PLAN ships (*Tuoitre News* 2014e; VNMOFA 2014d). Four fighter jets were also detected in the area (*Tuoitre News* 2014e). According to Ngo Ngoc Thu, by 5 June, China was deploying between 30 and 137 ships on a daily basis, including missile destroyers, missile defence, fast attack missile, submarine-hunting patrol ships, and amphibious transport docks. At its peak, there were 140 Chinese ships surrounding the HYSY 981 (VNMOFA 2014e). Chinese military aircraft and helicopters also flew over Vietnamese ships at a height of between 100 and 1,000 metres. According to Vietnamese reports, Chinese ships formed three circles to protect the rig: an innermost circle 1–1.5 nautical miles from the rig with 10–15 ships, a middle circle 4.5–5 nautical miles from the rig with 40–45

ships, including PLAN vessels, and an outermost circle 10–12 nautical miles from the rig with 25–35 ships, made up of CMS, FLEC and Coast Guard vessels, and steel-hulled fishing boats (Green et al. 2017, 220; *Nhandan Online* 2014).

The stand-off escalated in early June when a Chinese Coast Guard ship rammed a Vietnamese Coast Guard vessel. It was reported that the Chinese vessel then chased the Vietnamese boat and fired its high-powered water cannon. No Vietnamese personnel were injured, but the ship was badly damaged (Tuoitre News 2014f; *Thanhnieu News* 2014b). Vietnamese media characterised the incident as one of "the most severe attacks" against Vietnamese ships since the oil rig was installed in the contested waters (VOA 2014). Hanoi claimed that, by 5 June, 12 Vietnamese fisheries surveillance officers had been injured, and 24 law enforcement vessels and five coast guard ships had been damaged (VNMOFA 2014e). As the stand-off occurred at the peak of the fishing season, 12 Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracels were harassed and damaged by Chinese law enforcement vessels and fishing boats (VNMOFA 2014e). From the Chinese side, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued an official statement on 7 June accusing Vietnam of employing 63 vessels and ramming Chinese ships 1,416 times (FMPRC 2014p).

Meanwhile, Vietnam continued in vain to get China to address the crisis through diplomatic channels. On 23 May 2014, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a second *Note Verbale* to the Chinese Foreign Ministry demanding the latter withdraw their oil rig. On 4 June 2014, Vietnam sent a third *Note Verbale*. However, until 5 June, China offered no response. Tran Duy Hai told reporters that, by 5 June, Vietnam had tried to make more than 30 communications of all types with China (VNMOFA 2014g). According to a Vietnamese diplomat, the talks were "only to state each other's official stances" (ICG 2015, 20). Vietnam officials also claimed that China failed to respond to communications made through established hot lines (Thayer 2015d, 13).

With a lack of alternative options, Hanoi ensured that the issue caught international attention in order to put pressure on China. On 5 June 2014, Vietnam held a second international press conference on the issue with the participation of hundreds of representatives from the diplomatic corps, international organisations as well as local and foreign reporters (*Nhandan Online* 2014). Vietnam updated the press on new developments and provided information of the number of Chinese vessels and forces, as well as Chinese tactics. Hanoi even organised trips in which domestic and international reporters were allowed onto Vietnamese Coast Guard vessels to witness and report on the manoeuvres of Chinese ships (Do 2016b, 203; Shoji 2014, 2). Another aspect of Vietnam's efforts to internationalise the disputes was in bringing the issue to regional and international fora. The first letter concerning China's operation of the HYSY 981 on the EEZ and the continental shelf claimed by Vietnam sent to the UN Secretary General on 7 May was followed by another two letters on 28 May and 6 June to appeal for its legitimacy (VN UNPM 2014a; 2014b). Answering a question on Vietnam's stance on the U.S.' role in ensuring regional maritime security and safety on 6 June, the spokesperson of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Le Hai Binh, asserted that the U.S. spoke out to contribute to regional peace and stability as well as resolve current tensions in the region, and added that "[w]e hope that the U.S. will continue raising a stronger voice and offer more practical and constructive actions to contribute to maintaining peace, stability, maritime security and safety in the region and resolving regional disputes in accordance with international law" (*Nhandan Online* 2014).

In response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated its positions that the drilling activities were "fully legal and legitimate" and warned Hanoi to "give up its illusions, immediately stop all provocation and withdraw all vessels from the scene" (FMPRC 2014o). In an unexpected move, Wang Min, Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the UN presented Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with another formal position paper on 9 June, requesting that he circulate it to all 193 UN members (Thayer 2014e, 8). In the letter, China presented its position and accused Vietnam of provocative activities. Notably, China also outlined its historical claim to the Paracels in one separate part, which contrasted with only one short paragraph concerning this in the previous letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General on 22 May (PRC UNPM 2014b; 2014a). However, Carl Thayer (2014e, 8) remarked that Beijing's move of internationalising its maritime disputes with Hanoi did not represent a shift in its long-standing policy that the South China Sea issue could only be resolved bilaterally through direct consultations and negotiation, claiming instead that the submission of letters on Chinese positions and claims were part of media and propaganda warfare. According to Thayer (2014e, 8–9), it was designed to influence international public opinion, but also to outflank Vietnam's own propaganda and to isolate Vietnam.

In the economic sphere, the Chinese resorted to economic measures to increase the pressure on Hanoi. According to a report by the *Financial Times*, following anti-China riots in May, Chinese lenders effectively suspended credit lines to many engineering, procurement and construction contracts in Vietnam, leaving a number of projects in limbo and forcing some into restructuring (Bowring 2014). Furthermore, in mid-June, the *South China Morning Post* reported that the Chinese government had temporarily prohibited its state-owned enterprises from investing in Vietnam, which was interpreted as an attempt by Beijing to exercise economic leverage over Hanoi (*EIU ViewsWire* 2014). Besides this, Vietnam's tourism industry was badly hit by China's travel warning, as Chinese tourists accounted for about a quarter of the 4.3 million foreign visitors to Vietnam in the first six months of 2014. From May to June 2014, arrivals from the Chinese mainland to Vietnam fell by about 30 percent (Ives 2014).⁵³

According to Thayer's (2016a, 213) sources, China set four preconditions to de-escalate the crisis, which included: Vietnam must stop its harassment of the Chinese oil rig, must drop its sovereignty claims over the Paracels, must not pursue legal action against China, and must not involve third parties, such as the U.S.

The first and highest-level direct contact between the two sides since the beginning of the stand-off took place when Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi participated in the annual session of the Vietnam-China Joint Steering Committee in Hanoi on 18 June (Thiele 2017, 255). Despite the fact that the talks had been seen as an attempt to contain the crisis, Yang "was anything but conciliatory" (Abuza 2014). Yang scolded Hanoi for "hyping up" the row over the oil rig, which he claimed was conducting "completely legal" activities (Ho and Blanchard 2014). According to a summary of the meeting posted on the Chinese Foreign Ministry's website, Yang reiterated that

⁵³ According to some studies, however, "contemporaneous accounts generally do not indicate that China systematically threatened or imposed economic sanctions against Vietnam as part of the dispute" (Harrell, Rosenberg, and Saravalle 2018, 14; Leaf 2014). Other research on Chinese sanctions over South China Sea disputes, for which interviews were conducted with Vietnamese officials, claimed that Chinese officials had quietly informed their Vietnamese counterparts that they wanted to maintain normal trade ties (Poh 2017, 154).

the current difficulty in the bilateral relationship was a result of Vietnam's "constant and illegal disruption" and warned that China would "take all necessary measures" to protect the oil rig and its relevant drilling operations. He added that Vietnam should stop disrupting the HYSY 981's operation and "properly handle" the aftermath of anti-China riots (FMPRC 2014q). The meetings failed to produce any progress to contain the worst diplomatic crisis (Kwok 2014).

8.3.4. *The fourth phase: The increase in the number of oil rigs operating in undelimited waters, 18 June–14 July*

Soon after Yang Jiechi's visit, China employed a "strategic" move of increasing the number of oil rigs operating in the South China Sea. On 17 June 2014, the Chinese Maritime Safety Administration issued an announcement on the relocation of the Chinese oil rig *Nanhan 09* in the South China Sea. On 19 June 2014, the Vietnamese Coast Guard Command sighted the *Nanhai 09* oil rig and escort vessels off the Gulf of Tonkin in the waters, which have not been delimited (VNMOFA 2014h; *Petrotimes* 2014). The next day, China sent another three smaller oil rigs – the *Nanhai 02*, *05* and *04* – into the South China Sea. The location of the *Nanhai 02* and *05* oil rigs were placed between China's Guangdong province and the Pratas Islands, while the *Nanhai 04* was towed close to the Chinese coast (Yep 2014; *Reuters* 2014f). On 24 June 2014, according to the announcement of the Chinese Maritime Safety Administration, the maritime geophysical survey ship HYSY 719 would operate in the South China Sea from 23 June to 20 August 2014 and also within undelimited waters off the Gulf of Tonkin (VNMOFA 2014h; *Petrotimes* 2014). In early July 2014, China announced that the *Nanhai 04* would be in operation for one year from 9 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 in the South China Sea. The location lied within the overlapping waters in the mouth of Gulf of Tonkin which Vietnam and China have not yet delimited (*Nhip Cau Dau Tu* 2014). These oil rigs were placed on the Chinese side of the hypothetical equidistant between Vietnam and Hainan. According to a Vietnamese official, China had already explored in the waters where the *Nanhai 09* was operating (Panda 2014b). Furthermore, China did not premise its movements with claims on the sovereignty over the Paracels, but instead stated that the *Nanhai 09* operated "within the coastal waters off China's Hainan Island". The operations of these oil rigs therefore were less controversial than those of the HYSY 981 (Panda 2014b). Nevertheless, the increase in the number of oil rigs and the timing of the deployment shortly following Yang Jiechi's visit caused deep concern in Hanoi (*Petrotimes* 2014; VNMOFA 2014h). Zhuang Guotu, Director of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Xiamen University, called the new rig deployment a "strategic move" (*Reuters* 2014f). According to Zhuang, "the increase in oil rigs will inevitably jab a sensitive nerve for Vietnam and the Philippines" (*Reuters* 2014f).

In addition, China continued to send vessels to protect the oil rig. On 26 June, there were between 109 and 125 around the HYSY 981 oil rig, including four to six warships (VNMOFA 2014h). Until early July, China maintained more than 100 Chinese ships at the area. The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry told reporters that Chinese vessels continued to engage in attacks, international obstruction and intimidation in various different forms (VNMOFA 2014h).

Hanoi made active attempts to gain international support for its position. Another two letters from the Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the UN were sent to the UN Secretary-General on 3 July 2014. One letter addressed the placement of China's HYSY 981 in the Vietnam-claimed EEZ, while the other, which was circulated to all UN member countries in the 68th session of the General Assembly, referred only to Vietnam's claim of sovereignty over the Parcel

Archipelago (VN UNPM 2014c; 2014d). This diplomatic move by Vietnam was designed to counter China's claims presented by its 9 June letter to the UN Secretary-General.

Vietnamese leaders also raised opposition and resistance into a new level. On 20 June, Vietnam's President Truong Tan Sang issued his first significant comments on the dispute. He called China's actions illegal and declared that "it is unacceptable that strong countries can defy morality and justice" in an untypically direct manner (*EIU ViewsWire* 2014). This indicated a shift in Hanoi's approach to Beijing. On 1 July, when attending a meeting with Hanoi constituents, General Secretary Trong publicly commented on the South China Sea situation in detail and even mentioned the possibility of a military conflict. Trong stated that "[w]e should not cause conflict or war. At the same time, however, we should independently prepare for every possibility" (C. Hoang 2014; *Tuoi tre* 2014b). As noted by Tomataka Shoji, this was unprecedented, because, up to this point, it had primarily been the Prime Minister that had made remarks in concrete terms about the South China Sea issues (Shoji 2014, 3). This time, however, General Secretary Trong, who is the highest position of not only the Communist Party but also the Vietnamese political leadership, made such a statement. This demonstrated that, from Vietnam's perspective, the tension with China over the South China Sea was proceeding towards a new phase (Shoji 2014, 3). More importantly, the VCP's Politburo held a meeting in early July, where, according to some sources, it voted nine to five to hold a meeting of the Central Committee to specifically debate the South China Sea dispute and hold a proposal to initiate legal action against China (Thayer 2014f; 2015d, 13), which just one month earlier had been considered by Hanoi to be the "last resort" (C. H. Chua 2014). Furthermore, the Party arranged a visit by a Politburo member, Pham Quang Nghi, to the U.S. upon the invitation of the State Department later that month. According to Bill Hayton (2015, 15), the Hanoi leadership appeared to be using the visit to issue a warning signal to Beijing that it had the option to pursue closer relations with Washington if it so chose. The Party also approved the visit of Foreign Minister Minh to Washington, which was deferred in May and later rescheduled to take place in the autumn of that year (Thayer 2014f). Therefore, instead of submitting to China's preconditions of not pursuing legal action and not involving the U.S. in the dispute, Hanoi appeared to hedge the uncertainty by courting Washing and preparing a possible legal case against China.

8.3.5. The withdrawal of the HYSY 981 oil rig

On 15 July 2014, China announced the withdrawal of the HYSY 981. The oil rig was then removed from the contested waters as unexpectedly as it was deployed (Vuving 2014), one month ahead of the schedule announced by China in May. CNOOC declared in a statement that the HYSY 981 had completed its exploration and drilling operations and that oil and gas resources has been detected (AFP 2014f). China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated one day after the withdrawal announcement that the HYSY 981's operations had been "completed successfully on July 15 as scheduled" (FMPRC 2014t) and the oil rig had been "relocated in accordance with the relevant company's plan of operation at sea" (FMPRC 2014s). However, the official Chinese media reported that the rig's withdrawal was due in large part to the approaching typhoon Rammasun (Poling 2014c; AFP 2014f).

8.3.6. Outcome: An evaluation

Chinese maritime coercion during this episode relied on the special and non-traditional means of oil rigs to assert sovereignty claims over the Paracels and to compel Vietnam to accept China's

jurisdiction over the waters it claims in the South China Sea. During the crisis, law enforcement forces were employed to coerce Vietnam to stop interfering in the exercise of Chinese jurisdiction within China's self-proclaimed nine-dash line, thereby altering the status quo (Thayer 2014c). Despite China's employment of different coercive tactics and tools, China failed to achieve its objectives.

Vietnam did not stop dispatching vessels to prevent China from setting up the oil rig, nor did it withdraw them from the scene over the 73-day stand-off. Hanoi instead appeared to accept a significant level of risk by first sending ships to try to stop the rig from "establishing a fixed position" at the spot where it wanted to drill, and then monitoring and blocking the work (Shoji 2014, 1; AP 2014d; Green et al. 2017, 223). In spite of China's substantial show of force and frequent collisions and rammings, Hanoi continued to contest control over the area. Vietnamese vessels maintained their presence until the oil rig was removed (Green et al. 2017, 202, 223). It was China who decided to withdraw the oil rig a month before schedule.

Regarding the maritime disputes, Hanoi did not cede its claims to the islands, or to the waters claimed as part of its EEZ and continental shelf. In numerous occasions during and after the crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly claimed sovereignty over the Paracels. It signifies that Hanoi had no intention to drop its claims despite the fact that the Paracels have been occupied by China. Following this episode, the HYSY 981 returned to the South China Sea several times in June 2015, January and April 2016, and June 2017 (*BBC* 2015; *Dan Tri* 2016a; *Dan Tri* 2016b; *VOA* 2017). However, China's oil rigs did not cross over the Vietnamese side of the assumed median line between the two coasts on these occasions (Green et al. 2017, 223). This demonstrates that, to some extent, China has restrained from advancing its sovereignty and jurisdictional claims and pressuring Hanoi again over this issue. Precisely, for the moment, China appears to have postponed its efforts to change the status quo in this area.

Chinese maritime coercive diplomacy caused a deterioration in the Sino-Vietnamese bilateral relationship. It precipitated the most severe crisis in relations between the two countries since the 1979 border war (Thayer 2016a, 212). Despite China's subsequent gestures aimed at repairing ties, Vietnam's mistrust of its giant neighbor's intentions deepened. A Vietnamese Foreign Ministry-affiliated analyst stated that the incident was seen as a "wake-up call", creating a perception that "no matter how hard we try to maintain good relations, China will try to monopolise the South China Sea" (ICG 2015, 21).

Across the entire region, the oil rig crisis raised tensions to their highest levels since the end of the Cold War (Storey 2014, 3). This mainstream view on China's maritime coercion among analysts has been that "the loss has outweighed the gain" (ICG 2015, 5).

8.4. Explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

The following section provides explanations for the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy by examining the unclear terms of compliance, the asymmetry of motivation, and the U.S.' regional commitment.

8.4.1. Unclear terms of compliance and settlement

The tactical factors that lead to the ineffectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy against Vietnam centre around unclear terms of compliance and muddled objectives. China's main coercive goal in placing the oil rig in the Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf was to assert its sovereignty over the Paracels and compel Vietnam to accept its jurisdiction over the waters it claims. Beijing's communication of this desire, however, was often lost within indirect and contradictory messages. During the crisis, China repeatedly urged the Vietnamese side to "respect China's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction". The only direct demand delivered to Vietnam referred to "stop[ping] immediately disruptive and damaging activities" and "pull[ing] out all vessels and personnel from the scene and restor[ing] tranquillity to the sea". China's preconditions for de-escalating the crisis, however, also included other issues related to general dispute management and resolution mechanisms and the involvement of a third party - the U.S. (Thayer 2016a, 213). More importantly, under the context of stable and good relations between the two countries immediately before the deployment of the oil rig, the underlying objective of the Chinese was not made clear to the Vietnamese. In fact, when the HYSY 981 was launched in the South China Sea two years earlier, the prospect that the HYSY 981 would be placed in waters claimed by Vietnam became "one of the worst fears" for Hanoi (Torode and Zhu 2014). However, given the fact that relations between Vietnam and China were good from late 2011 to early 2014, as demonstrated by positive developments and the agreements signed between the two countries' leaders, a Vietnamese analyst described Hanoi's impression prior to the crisis by stating that "there had been hope we could manage disputes and make skilful moves to meet mid-way" (ICG 2015, 22). However, "the rig disappointed Vietnam" (ICG 2015, 22), as a veteran Vietnamese diplomat, who participated in dispute management with China in the early 1990s, remarked that Beijing's actions broke all established patterns. He noted that "China didn't have a pretext. There was no signalling. Vietnam is now unable to predict China's behaviour. We are wondering why China acted this way when bilateral relations were good" (ICG 2015, 20). That caused Hanoi to feel "very betrayed" by China (USCC 2015, 470). According to George and Simons (1994a, 280), the clarity and consistency of demands help to persuade the opponent of the coercing power's strength of purpose. Struggling to decipher Beijing's overarching objective and intentions from the outset, both during and following the crisis (ICG 2015, 22), Hanoi chose to resist at the scene while remaining open to communication.

8.4.2. The asymmetry of motivation

China did not possess an advantage in the crisis with Vietnam, as Beijing failed to exploit its advantage over the Paracels and was weakened by its choice and justification for the location of the oil rig. Equally, Beijing seemed to be unprepared for a vehement reaction from Vietnam.

China often claims that there is no dispute over the sovereignty of the Paracels (FMPRC 2014n; 2014j). China has been in possession of the entire archipelago since 1974. However, by choosing to locate the oil rig and advancing the argument that the location of HYSY 981 was closer to the Paracel Islands than the Vietnamese coastline (FMPRC 2014n; Thayer 2014e, 9), China raised the sovereignty dispute over the Paracels with Vietnam. As one Chinese analyst notes, the tensions "made the whole world know the Paracels are disputed" at a time when China denies their sovereignty is contested and is already exercising de-fact control (ICG 2015, 5).

As mentioned previously, after the 2011 tensions caused by the cable-cutting incidents, Vietnam took steps to improve relations with China and attempted to establish mechanisms to manage maritime disputes. Vietnam and China showed some signs of rapprochement when leaders

of the two countries signed an Agreement on Basic Principles (Taylor 2014). By the end of 2012, some analysts assessed that Hanoi had begun to lessen its opposition to Chinese policy, citing Vietnam's caution in its support for the Philippines and Japan, and its jailing of anti-Chinese nationalists (Ross and Li 2016, 246). In 2013, a naval hot line was set up between the two Defence Ministries of China and Vietnam (VOA 2013). Furthermore, during a visit to Beijing by Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang in 2013, the two sides set up another hotline to defuse territorial disputes and expanded a 2006 agreement for joint oil exploration in the Gulf of Tonkin (*Bloomberg News* 2013). Also, seven months before the oil rig crisis, in October 2013, the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, hosted the Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang, in Hanoi and agreed to form a working group on maritime cooperation with China (*Vietnamnet* 2013; FMPRC 2013). In brief, from late 2011 to early 2014, the two Communist Party-ruled neighbours maintained a relatively good relationship. According to Carl Thayer, by the time of China's deployment of the HYSY 981 oil rig, the majority of Vietnam's Politburo still favoured accommodation with China (Kwok 2014). As Dingding Chen (2014) argued, China's action was partly prompted by the belief that Vietnam was too much economically dependent upon China and was helpless. According to Chen, Vietnam might not want to become an ally to the U.S. in opposing China because it would still need China's market and investment to develop. He argued that politically, "providing that the [VCP] remains in power, there will not be fundamental change in the political relationship between Vietnam and the U.S." and that "the [VCP] might lose face in confrontations with China; but it will lose life if getting too close to the U.S." (D. Chen 2014). Beijing might have believed that it could more easily de-escalate a conflict with Hanoi (Leaf 2014), as Vietnam's military capabilities were dwarfed by China's assets.

However, Vietnamese diplomats noted that the highest-level Chinese official to publicly comment on the dispute was only a deputy-director general of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs. Therefore, "[t]he thinness of communications likely reflected Beijing's unpreparedness for the ferocity of backlash from Vietnam" (ICG 2015, 20–21). Caught off-guard by the vehement response from Hanoi, Beijing "scrambled for weeks to get the situation under control" (ICG 2015, 10). According to a Chinese analyst, the Foreign Ministry was said to be represented by the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs, whose "primary concern is sovereignty", without Department of Asian Affairs input (ICG 2015, 10). Thus, as an analyst interviewed by the International Crisis Group (2015, 10) explained, "[t]here wasn't consultation with experts who understand Vietnam" and "there wasn't enough risk assessment".

Vietnam had no shortage of motivation to resist China's coercive move. First, in terms of the location, the HYSY 981 oil rig operated in the overlapping area of the EEZ and continental shelf generating from China's Hainan Island and the coast of Vietnam (L. D. Pham and Tran 2015, 65–66). The dispute over rights to exploit seabed resources in this area can only be resolved through bilateral negotiations or voluntary international adjudication (Green et al. 2017, 207). Based on the hypothetical equidistant line between the coast of Hainan Island and mainland Vietnam – if this is an option for eventual delimitation, the oil rig operated well on the Vietnamese side of the line (Green et al. 2017, 202, 207; H. D. Vu 2014, 40–41). In 1997 and 2004, China had deployed an oil drilling platform to operate in maritime zones claimed by Vietnam (Buszynski 2014, 115; T. T. Tran 2011a, 189); however, China had never before placed an oil rig at this location (L. D. Pham and Tran 2015, 65–66). Second, according to Tran Duy Hai, oil platforms taking part in previous survey activities by China in Vietnam's claimed waters had been contracted between China and foreign contractors. In those occasions, Vietnam condemned and even met

foreign contractors to make its protests. Hence, no previous drilling exploration activities had been undertaken by China in Vietnam's claimed EEZ. This was the first time that China had used its own and largest oil drilling platform to conduct drilling explorations in the EEZ claimed by Vietnam (*Tuoitre Online* 2014). As China had never previously conducted any oil-related activities in this area, the placement of the oil rig changed the status quo (L. D. Pham and Tran 2015, 66). Thus, if Hanoi had not protested China's activities, it would have implicitly accepted a new status quo of the area. Third, China did not justify the placement of the oil rig by reference to Hainan Island and its EEZ and continental shelf, but rather on its claims to sovereignty over the Paracels. This was considered unacceptable by Hanoi due to the fact that Vietnam has always considered China's occupation of the Paracels by force illegal and has consistently claimed sovereignty over the Paracels. Finally, after the Chinese side turned down all of Vietnam's proposals for talks, and increased coercive activities at sea by sending more ships and engaging in violent confrontations, whilst consistently criticising Hanoi, pressures continued to build within Vietnamese society and the party, inducing the government to take stronger actions against China (Thayer 2014f).

At the scene, Vietnamese vessels were outnumbered by the Chinese fleet, and the superiority of the Chinese military rendered unpalatable for Vietnam the option of escalating the situation through military attack (Heath 2017, 79–80). Therefore, according to Carl Thayer, Vietnam got to "play some of the only options it has got left", which included preparing a possible legal case and courting Washington (Mogato and Ruwitch 2014). However, before Vietnam could do this, China withdrew the oil rig and brought an abrupt end to the crisis (Thayer 2015d, 13).

According to retired Vietnamese General Nguyen Trong Vinh, China deliberately withdrew the oil rig to influence the outcome of the upcoming Vietnamese Party Plenum (Thayer 2014f). Beijing once warned Vietnam that legal action would cross a red line and rupture bilateral ties (ICG 2015, 22). In private remarks with Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh upon his visit to Hanoi in June 2014, Yang Jiechi also strongly advised Vietnam not to take legal action against China in the interest of repairing bilateral relations (Thayer 2014f). It therefore appears that Beijing strategically de-escalated the situation so as not to push Vietnam to cross that line. Carl Thayer (2014f) shares this viewpoint, noting that Beijing withdrew its drilling platform in order to prevent relations with Hanoi from worsening to such an extent that Vietnam not only took legal action against China but also aligned itself more closely with the U.S..

8.4.3. U.S. regional commitment

The deployment of HYSY 981 took place days after U.S. President Obama's visit to Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines in late April 2014. The tour promoted the strategic pivot to the Asia Pacific and sought to underline the U.S.' commitment to its allies (Ruwitch 2014). During his visit, President Obama publicly opposed the settlement of territorial disputes by intimidation or coercion (Thayer 2014b). Also, in April 2014, Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel hosted a meeting with the ASEAN Defence Ministers in Honolulu – the very first U.S.-ADMM held in the U.S. Washington tried to "court Vietnam as a new ally in the region with trade and military incentives" (Blanchard and Nguyen 2014b). One month before the crisis, the U.S. sent two ships and 400 U.S. personnel to take part in joint non-combat naval exercises with Vietnam.

On 6 May, after China deployed the HYSY 981 oil rig to Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf, a State Department spokesperson singled out Beijing's actions "as provocative and unhelpful to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region" (US DOS 2014c). The State

Department released a press statement the following day criticising China's "unilateral action" as "part of broader pattern of Chinese behaviour to advance its claims over disputed territory in a manner that undermines peace and stability in the region". The statement also affirmed that "[s]overeignty over the Paracel Islands is disputed" and that the HYSY 981's location was "in waters claimed by Vietnam and China near those islands" (US DOS 2014d). This contrasted markedly with China's long-standing position of claiming that there is no disputes over the Paracels.

Washington also weighed in more directly (Green et al. 2017, 213), and sharpened its rhetoric towards Beijing (Francisco and Mogato 2014). On 8 May, during a prescheduled trip to Vietnam, Assistant Secretary Daniel Russel reiterated Washington's concerns about "dangerous conduct" and its opposition to "any intimidation by vessels" in the disputed area (Blanchard and Nguyen 2014b; US DOS 2014e). On 13 May, in a phone conversation with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, Secretary of State John Kerry said Beijing's deployment of the oil rig and its escorts was "provocative" and "aggressive" (Glaser and Vitello 2014, 34).

With regard to Vietnam-U.S. relations, on 21 May, after speaking on the phone with Vietnam Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to review developments on China's deployment of the oil rig, Secretary Kerry invited his Vietnamese counterpart to visit Washington for a full consultation (BBC 2014b). On the same day, Assistant Secretary Russel announced that the U.S. would commit 18 million USD in foreign military financing to the Vietnamese Coast Guard (Green et al. 2017, 219). On 22 May, the U.S. stated that it would support Vietnam if Hanoi chose to pursue "arbitration or other international legal mechanisms" (Reuters 2014e). The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Locklear, told reporters on 23 May that he had "serious concerns" about the risk of a miscalculation escalating into armed conflict (Green et al. 2017, 220), and urged both countries to exercise restraint. When asked about a potential deeper U.S. relationship with Vietnam, Admiral Locklear said that Washington had been forging such relationship and would welcome strategic ties with Hanoi (AP 2014g).

The U.S. also led international criticism of China for its "provocative" deployment of the oil rig and disruption of stability in the South China Sea (Sutter and Huang 2014b, 60; JP MOFA 2014). After reassuring that the U.S.' rebalance to Asia was "not a goal, not a promise, or a vision", but rather is "a reality" at the Shangri-La Dialogue in late May, U.S. Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel called out China for taking "destabilising, unilateral" actions (US DOD 2014). He added that the U.S. would "not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged" and would "firmly oppose any nation's use of intimidation, coercion or the threat of force" to assert its claims (US DOD 2014). His criticism, according to some observers, were harsher than it had been one year earlier (Glaser and Vitello 2014, 31). Japan voiced its criticism, and the G-7 also issued a statement noting concerns over tensions in early June (Sutter and Huang 2014b, 60; JP MOFA 2014).

According to regional military and diplomatic sources, Washington had not deployed any warships close to the disputed area, although routine surveillance flights over the South China Sea were ongoing (Blanchard and Nguyen 2014b). The U.S. dispatched reconnaissance aircraft to fly over the Chinese deep-water oil rig twice (H. H. Le 2015, 20; *Vietnamplus* 2014). On 30 June, Vietnamese Coast Guard officers spotted two U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, *EP-3* and *RC-135*, flying just 200 metres above the Chinese oil rig. On 2 July, an *EP-3* reconnaissance plane was also seen flying above the oil rig (*Thanhniem News* 2014c).

On 10 July, the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution stating that "China's territorial claims and associated maritime actions in support of the drilling activity of the HYSY 981 have not been clarified under international law, constitute a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force, and appear to be in violation of the 2002 DOC". The resolution called on China to withdraw the drilling rig and "return immediately to the status quo as it existed before 1 May 2014" (US Congress 2014). On 14 July, Evan Medeiros, Special Assistant to U.S. President Barack Obama, met Vietnam's Foreign Minister Minh to seek measures for the two countries' future comprehensive partnership (VNMOFA 2014i).

China's Foreign Ministry declared that the withdrawal of the 981 oil rig had "nothing to do with any external factor" (FMPRC 2014s; AFP 2014f), which Wu Shicun clarified as "U.S. influence" (Thayer 2014f). China, however, noted that the U.S.' increasing efforts to reassure its allies and more direct involvement in the region's affairs, including disputes in the South China Sea. One Chinese scholar, Shulong Chu, assessed that the U.S. position changed dramatically in the first half of 2014. A *People's Daily* commentary made a remark that "the U.S. is encouraging the adventurous mentalities of individual countries in Asia and is complicating and sensitising the dispute [...]. In the long term, direct or indirect interference by the U.S. will also increase the difficulty of constructing Asia's security framework [...]" (People's Daily 2014c). After all high-level U.S. officials immediately responded by criticising China (Chu 2014, 18–19), China again blamed the U.S. for stoking tension in the South China Sea by encouraging countries to engage in dangerous behaviour (*Reuters* 2014b). China added that the Paracels had "nothing to do with Vietnam and even less to do with the U.S." (Xinhua 2014g). Following Secretary Kerry's 13 May remark, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement cautioning Secretary Kerry to be more objective and "speak and act cautiously". A Chinese spokesperson commented that regional states had been "emboldened" by the U.S.' "wrong words and actions" (Green et al. 2017, 216). On 15 May, Chinese PLA's Chief of General Staff General Fang Fenghui blamed the Obama administration's new focus on Asia for various disputes in the East and South China Seas, saying "some neighbouring countries" were using this as an opportunity to provoke problems. He also warned that the U.S. must be objective about tensions between China and Vietnam or risk harming relations between Washington and Beijing (Hodal and Kaiman 2014). Also, in his speech at the Fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, held in Shanghai on 21 May, Chinese President Xi Jinping criticised military alliances with third parties as unhelpful for the region's security (Ruwitch 2014; *VOA News* 2014; Heath 2014). Xi made these remarks in front of representatives of neighbouring countries, including Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan and officials from the Philippines and Japan (Ruwitch 2014; Heath 2014). As China analyst Timothy Heath points out, China objects to the alliance system as a threat to its security and sovereignty (Heath 2014). U.S. efforts to reassure its allies and partners through rebalancing and through criticism of China for "provoking instability" intensified Chinese anxieties (Heath 2014).

8.5. Analytical summary

The deployment of China's ultradeep-water oil rig to Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf could be seen "one of the most assertive moves" China has made in seas (*Reuters* 2014d). It was a Chinese escalation of its territorial and maritime dispute with Vietnam and was 'the first such action by Beijing in contested waters' (Manicom 2014, 8; Blanchard and Nguyen 2014a). This maritime coercive diplomacy relied on a non-traditional means – the oil rig. First, China placed its

largest deep-water at that time on the Vietnamese side of the hypothetical equidistant line for the first time, and later increased the number of the oil rigs operating in undelimited waters in the Gulf of Tonkin to put pressure on Vietnam. Beijing also took advantage of its superiority in military and law enforcement forces to maintain the oil rig's operation and forcefully persuade the Vietnamese fleet to withdraw.

China's move was widely considered as an indication of its adoption of a more "proactive assertive" approach in the South China Sea. This approach involved China taking the initiative, without requiring any provocations from other countries, as neither Vietnam nor any other country had provoked China to take action (T. T. Tran 2017, 165; F. Zhang 2016, 103; ICG 2015, 10). China proactively asserted its sovereignty claims over the Paracel Islands and its jurisdiction over the waters it claims, thereby compelling Vietnam to accept a new status quo in the area.

However, China failed to achieve its coercive goals. Hanoi maintained its vessels in the area for more than two months in order to challenge the rig's presence and China's exercise of its jurisdiction within Vietnam's claimed EEZ. Hanoi also refused to drop its claims of sovereignty over the Paracels. China's maritime coercive diplomacy had negative effects on the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, which became strained to a level not seen since 1979. Importantly, China's unilateral drilling in the Vietnamese EEZ pushed Hanoi to prepare a possible legal case of its own against China and threaten a de facto alliance with the U.S. (Vuving 2014)

The ineffectiveness of Chinese coercive diplomacy resulted from a lack of clarity over the terms of compliance, an asymmetry of motivation and the U.S.' reaction. Although China's main coercive goals were to strengthen its claims of sovereignty over the Paracels and to compel Vietnam to accept its jurisdiction over the waters it claims, Chinese messages and signals gave Hanoi no clear indication of China's overarching intentions, nor did they clearly establish the terms of compliance. Given the fact that Vietnam had attempted to maintain a good relationship with China in the years preceding the crisis and the lack of provocation by Vietnam, the Chinese' move perplexed Hanoi and prohibited the Vietnamese government from choosing to back down. With regard to the two sides' motivations, the asymmetry was in Vietnam's favour. The choice of the HYSY 981's location and its justification on the premise of China's claims to sovereignty over the Paracels strengthened Vietnam's will to resist and weakened China's advantage resulting from its current de facto control of the entire archipelago. China's moved forced Hanoi to either accept a change in the status quo and recognise Chinese sovereignty over the Paracel Islands or resist. China pushed Vietnam into a no-other-choice situation but to resist, because the first option was simply unacceptable for Hanoi. Whilst Hanoi did call for international negotiations over the Paracels and the surrounding waters, Hanoi would never formally concede these claims (Perlez 2014b; 2014a; Green et al. 2017, 208). Despite the fact that China exercises de facto control over the Paracel Islands and said it would not consider such talks (Perlez 2014b), Beijing's actions raised the issue and made the archipelago and adjacent waters known internationally as contested areas. In addition, China incorrectly perceived that it would be easy to de-escalate a conflict with the Vietnamese. The effectiveness of Chinese coercive diplomacy was also in part affected by the U.S.' more direct involvement in the disputes of the South China Sea and its approach towards Vietnam. However, in the case of the HYSY 981 crisis, the situational factor of the asymmetry of motivation between Vietnam and China played a more important role in the outcome of coercion than the involvement and counter-coercion of an external power. Vietnam's persistence and level of risk acceptance in terms of maintaining its presence on the ground, threatening to form a de

facto alliance with the U.S., and especially pursuing a possible legal action against China appear to have convinced China to withdraw the oil rig early and refrain from reinstalling the rig in the same area (Green et al. 2017, 223).

Lastly, with regard to domestic factors, according to Do Thanh Hai (2016b, 202), China's action was not an initiative by the Hainan authorities or any single agency. Whilst CNOOC may be a state-owned enterprise, the decision to move a one-billion-USD asset into an area with questionable hydrocarbon reserves while inciting a diplomatic crisis appears to have obtained Beijing's backing (Downs 2014, 7; Panda 2014a). Furthermore, the move was premeditated. It was reported that the Chinese Coast Guard deployed China Maritime Police vessels from many different detachments, including Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan and Fujian, but also from provinces as far away as Zhejiang, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Hebei (Martinson 2017, 14–15). The mobilisation and presence of a large flotilla of fishing trawlers, civilian maritime patrol vessels, and warships for nearly 80 days suggests that the operation was planned, given its requirement of a high degree of inter-agency cooperation among the PLAN, Coast Guard and state-owned enterprise (Storey 2014, 3; Thayer 2014b). It is highly likely that the decision to send the oil rig was taken at the highest levels of the Chinese government (Storey and Lin 2016, 9). This case once again demonstrates that there was no lack of coordination among government agencies, such that this aspect of internal factor did not adversely affect the eventual outcome of Chinese coercive diplomacy. With respect to public opinion within China, evidence suggests that instead of exploiting nationalist public opinion to pressurise Hanoi during the crisis, the Chinese government actually controlled the media and prevented it from covering the stand-off and the riots in Vietnam. As Li Mingjiang and Irene Chan concluded, the media clamp-down on the stand-off and the riots was effective in tempering the domestic reaction (M. Li and Chan 2015, 45). Limiting public participation allowed Beijing to control the level of escalation. Therefore, the failure to achieve coercive objectives did not result from the lack of public support. On the part of Vietnam, it cannot be denied that Hanoi got pressure from the public to take strong position against China during the stand-off, as the unprecedentedly large scale of anti-China demonstration across the country and the violent riots took place in May 2014. In July, 61 prominent party members, including retired Generals and a former Ambassador to Beijing, urged the Hanoi leadership to "escape" from its reliance on China and "exit China's orbit" in an open letter. They also called on the government to take legal action against China (*South China Morning Post* 2014; ICG 2015, 22). Although Hanoi does not face elections, public opinion can matter because the regime's political legitimacy is dependent upon the public's perception of its ability to stand strong in the face of interstate disputes like the South China Sea (Chubb 2018; P. Hoang 2019, 5). Hanoi was put under pressure by these domestic protests; however, Hanoi's policy and resistance against China from the beginning to the end of the stand-off were never shaped by pressure from the public. Hanoi, like Beijing, used nationalist domestic demonstrations to send signals of resolve and displeasure. It is worth noting that, after rioting broke out, the Vietnamese government cracked down on anti-China rallies. According to the data collected by Phuong Hoang (2019, 16) at the National Intelligence University, after 18 May there were no more demonstrations. From then until mid-July, when China withdrew the HYSY 981, Hanoi continued to pursue a firm stance and request Beijing's removal of the oil rig (P. Hoang 2019, 16–19), demonstrating that internal had little impact on Vietnam's chosen policy of resistance during the HYSY 981 stand-off.

Chapter 9

China's Spratly Islands land reclamation, 2013–2015 and militarisation in the South China Sea, 2016–present

This chapter focuses on China's land reclamation and construction work in disputed features under Chinese control in the Spratlys starting in late 2013. The chapter begins with an overview of scope and types of construction activities conducted by China and Southeast Asian claimant states in the Spratlys for the past four decades, up to early 2010s. The next section examines China's capabilities and the drivers behind China's island-building activities. Chinese land reclamation, construction and deployment activities at seven reefs in three periods from late 2013 up to present is then addressed in detail. Also shown are the measures and means China employed in its maritime coercion in order to assert its claims over contested features and waters. The chapter then analyses the coercive nature of China's *fait accompli* and assesses the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. An analysis of how the U.S. reaction and the asymmetry of power and motivation in China's favour led to the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy is provided in the last main section.

9.1. Background

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Spratly Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Over the past two decades, except for Brunei, all of the territorial claimants have developed military outposts in the South China Sea. These outposts help claimant states establish presence, assert sovereignty claims to land features, and monitor the activities of other claimants. All of these claimants have also engaged in various types of outpost upgrades, which include land reclamation, building construction and extension, and defence emplacements on maritime features they occupy. The scope and degree of these construction activities vary across claimants (Shear 2015; Paul 2016, 13; Green et al. 2017, 236).

Taiwan occupied the largest naturally formed feature in the Spratly group, Itu Aba, where it built a base in the late 1950s (Rapp-Hooper 2015b). In 2006, Taiwan began constructing an airstrip on Itu Aba, and construction finished in 2008 (*Taipei Times* 2006; Chase and Purser 2015; AMTI 2015c). Malaysia built an airfield on Swallow Reef in the 1983 and completed the modernisation of the Layang-Layang Airport there in 2003. The Philippines also constructed an airstrip on Thitu Island in the late 1970s. During the 1980s, Manila reclaimed with approximately 14 acres of land reclamation to extend this runway (US DOD 2015b, 15; Chase and Purser 2015; AMTI 2015c). Vietnam constructed a lighthouse on West London Reef and gradually improved facilities on all of its features in 1994 (Thayer 2017a). In 2004, Vietnam began work to rebuild a disused runway on Big Spratly (*BBC* 2004). Since 2009, Vietnam has added radar and communication equipment at 15 outposts, point defence improvements at 18 outposts and civilian infrastructure at five outposts (US DOD 2015b, 15). Vietnam also built administrative buildings and five military structures on West London Reef between 2010 and 2012 (Thayer 2017a).

As the last to arrive, China occupied seven features in the Spratly Islands, as mentioned in Chapter Four, including Hughes Reef, Johnson South Reef, Mischief Reef, Gaven Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Cuarteron Reef. The first three reefs are within the EEZ that the Philippines claims from its island of Palawan. Vietnam claims sovereignty over the entire Spratly archipelago, including all of the features under Chinese occupation (E. Wong and Ansfield 2014; Q. Q. Le and Tran 2016). Since 1988, like other claimants, China has taken steps to expand its foothold on these seven features (McDevitt 2017, 5). China has had a troop and supply garrison at Gaven Reef since 2003. At Johnson South Reef, until early 2014, the only man-made feature here was a small concrete platform that housed a communication facility, garrison building, and pier (Rapp-Hooper 2015a). China's development of Fiery Cross Reef began with the construction of a two-storey cement structure in 1990. As of early 2014, Fiery Cross Reef was thought to accommodate approximately 200 troops and had radar and surveillance capabilities, helicopter landing pads and a wharf (Rapp-Hooper 2015a; DJ Sta 2014). After taking possession of Mischief Reef in 1995, China slowly turned this feature into a military outpost (Himmelman 2013). In late 1998, Beijing added three octagon-shaped structures and two concrete towers with satellite communications arrays and high-frequency antennae. China later built two piers, a helipad, and installed navigational radar and anti-aircraft guns (Thayer 2017b). On Subi Reef, China erected a structure in the 1990s. By 1997, Subi Reef hosted satellite communications and a helipad. In 2011, a radome was identified there (Thayer 2016b, 11; Bussert and Elleman 2011, 144). Subi Reef also had around 200 troops stationed there (DJ Sta 2014). The structures erected by China on some of the features under its control prior to 2014 were small and could not accommodate combat aircraft or major surface combatants (USCC 2015, 432). Furthermore, at the time China was the only major claimant without airstrips in the Spratlys (Erickson and Strange 2014; Shear 2015).

ASEAN and China signed the DOC in 2002, which urges all parties to "exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and others features" (ASEAN 2012). This legally nonbinding DOC does not directly address land reclamation to transform features into artificial islands (Dolven et al. 2015, 7). Nor does it explicitly prevent the signatories from land reclamation, building construction, or defence emplacements (Green et al. 2017, 236; Hayton 2018a, 50). Nevertheless, this was generally interpreted as a commitment to maintain the status quo (Green et al. 2017, 236).

In late 2013, Beijing decided to launch unprecedented land reclamation and construction on the seven reefs under its control in the Spratly Islands. China reclaimed 3,200 acres of former reefs in total. By 2016, China's work turned all seven reefs into full-fledged islands and enabled them to host military facilities. In particular, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, and Fiery Cross Reefs, which now have become the largest islands in the South China Sea, are equipped with three airstrips over three kilometres in length, capable of accommodating all types of military airplanes and fighters. Subsequently, China has begun militarisation activities, such as installing anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles on these artificial islands.

9.2. China's interests, capabilities and objectives

Some argue that Chinese reclamation activities are only the catch-up. China is not the only country engaging in reclamation and construction work on their outposts in the South China Sea. Other Southeast Asian claimants have conducted building activities on their occupied features in the Spratly Islands. In 2013, Malaysia refurbished two air hangars and added a new building and water storage facility at Swallow Reef. Also in 2013, Manila constructed new support buildings at four outposts and cleared a road around Thitu (US DOD 2015b, 15). Since 2011, Vietnam started building helipads on six outposts. Also, since August 2011, Hanoi has embarked on efforts to improve the infrastructure on Sandy Cay by expanding the beach, reinforcing the seawalls, and building piers and a large complex hosting a harbour, a surveillance facility and defensive structures (US DOD 2015b, 15; Thayer 2017a; Hayton 2018a, 50). The U.S. Department of Defence called Vietnam "the most active claimant in terms of outpost upgrades and land reclamation" prior to China's massive island-building operation (US DOD 2015b, 15; Shear 2015).

Given active construction works conducted by other claimants, China might have been "driven by a sense of urgency" (ICG 2015, 8). As Feng Zhang asserts, China "has long felt it has lagged dangerously behind the construction activities of Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines" (F. Zhang 2016, 106). Indeed, prior to 2014, China was the only major claimant state without runways in the Spratlys. It can be argued that prior to 2014, Beijing might have perceived that it was still behind and that it was not in a strong position vis-à-vis other claimants with respect to construction in the Spratly Island. However, China's island-building and construction projects were not simply to catch up with much smaller rival claimants. Beijing's decision to implement reclamation and building operations on such an unprecedented scale and pace must have been made for reasons beyond that consideration. Feng Zhu, Director of the Collaborative Innovation Centre for South China Sea Studies at Nanjing University, bluntly puts it, "China's island and reef construction in South China Sea is commensurate with its economic size and power as the largest economy in Asia" (Zhu 2015, 18). Sharing this point of view, Li Jie, a Beijing-based military expert, although complaining about other claimants' reclamation, said "[i]t's hard to say which reclamation project is the biggest one as its scale should meet with China's defence capability, maritime interests, as well as its long-term defence strategy" (Chan 2014).

Thus, others link massive island reclamation and construction work to Beijing's strategy of building China into a maritime power. In 2008, the former Chinese President Hu Jintao first pointed out that China must make a transition from being a land power to being a maritime power (M. Li and Chan 2015, 42; Hille 2012). The 12th Five-year Plan for Comprehensive Overall Socio-Economic Development, published in 2011, specifically included language supporting "the development of remote sea islands" and strengthening "reclamation management" (Hayton 2018a, 59). The 18th Party Congress of the CCP in November 2012 marked an important defining moment by setting a new goal of "build[ing] China into a strong maritime power" (Bickford 2016, 1–2). "Building a maritime power" since then has been listed as a national key strategy and appeared in the 18th Party Congress Report as well as in multiple policy documents (M. Li and Chan 2015, 42; Lu 2015, 217). Three aspects of this goal include: first, formulating an effective control, management and protection of previously neglected maritime domains, particularly the East China Sea and South China Seas; second, exerting significant influence on regional and international regulations and practices by using assertive maritime diplomacy; and third, becoming one of the world's most powerful maritime economies through effective use of maritime resources within and outside of China's sovereign space (Y. Wang 2014; M. Li and Chan 2015, 42). In April 2013, the

Chinese Ministry of Defence published its White Paper, which emphasised that "[t]he seas and oceans provide immense space and abundant resources for China's sustainable development, and thus are of vital importance to the people's wellbeing and China's future" (IOSC 2013). The White Paper also highlighted that "[i]t is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilise and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power" (IOSC 2013). Furthermore, at a study session with members of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee in July 2013, Xi Jinping said that oceans and seas has an increasingly important role to play in China's economic development and opening up to the outside world, and that their status has become more prominent in regards to safeguarding state sovereignty, national security and development interests. Xi also added that the seas have an increasingly important status concerning global competition in the spheres of politics, economic development, the military, and technology. Hence, Xi called for China's efforts to learn more about and further manage the development of the ocean and to build China into a maritime power (Xinhua 2013d).

Under that direction, seven outposts under Chinese control in the Spratlys appeared to hold increasing strategic value to Beijing's new maritime strategy. Bonnie Glaser and Tran Truong Thuy argue that the creation of artificial islands on those seven features in the Spratlys' fish-rich waters would allow Chinese fishing fleets to extend the duration and scope of their activities, further consolidating China's economic dominance and, by extension, its de facto right to the area's resources (Glaser 2015a, 33; T. T. Tran 2014). Furthermore, an enhanced Chinese presence at the eastern and southern edges of the South China Sea would allow for more frequent and larger-scale disruption to energy exploration conducted by claimants in what China views as disputed waters (Glaser 2015a, 35). Seven strong outposts also substantially extend the radius and frequency of patrols by Chinese Coast Guard forces, enabling China to project decisive power into the centre of maritime Southeast Asia and to achieve dominance within the nine-dash line (Storey 2015, 71; Paul 2016, 15). The PLA Major General Luo Yuan argued that controlling the South China Sea islands, including the Spratlys, would enable China to effectively control this vital maritime region and international shipping routes (F. Zhang 2017, 449). Chinese military leaders proposed land reclamation as a means by which China could establish a permanent foothold in the South China Sea (F. Zhang 2017, 453). By 2009, naval chiefs called for further Chinese military instalments to be built on the disputed islets in the South China Sea. The former Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the PLA General Zhang Li recommended that China build an airport and seaport on Mischief Reef. With additional facilities, the intention was to conduct air patrols over the area, to support Chinese fishing vessels, and to demonstrate China's sovereignty over the South China Sea. At that time, Zhang Li said if the airport and seaport were constructed, China would then be able to control the Spratlys and provide a platform for Chinese naval vessels to bypass the Malacca Strait (Hsiao 2009; Hong and Jiang 2010, 147). Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, "control" of the South China Sea is very high on its list of interests (McDevitt 2014, 31). According to You Ji (2017, 8), PLA analysts are confident that the reclamation work has given Beijing greater room for manoeuvre as a "big power".

Additionally, according to Feng Zhang, the Chinese hard-liners, including military leaders, who have had a great policy influence in the island-building project, have a desire to expand China's security perimeter at the cost of U.S. military dominance. They believe that a U.S. military intervention into South China Sea disputes would constitute an "invasion of China" (Luo 2015, 44; F. Zhang 2017, 455). Therefore, island-building and militarisation in the Spratlys is also meant to deter or counter a U.S. intervention by imposing costs (F. Zhang 2017, 455).

Land reclamation and construction activities, however, cannot be set in motion without China's growing capabilities and advanced technology. According to Andrew Erickson, in the 1990s, a large fleet of dredging ships did not exist. Not until 2001 did China make a conscious effort to improve and expand its dredging fleet. In the short span of a decade, China's annual dredging capacity increased from 300 million cubic metres in 2001 to over 1 billion cubic metres in 2009, making it the world's biggest dredging country in terms of annual capacity. 20 trailing suction hopper dredgers were built between 2005 and 2012. And in the period from 2004 to 2011, at least 44 large cutter suction dredgers were launched (Erickson and Bond 2015). In recent years, China has built up an armada of oceangoing dredging ships, which are among the most technologically advanced in the world (Beiser 2018). According to Chinese reports, the one playing "a decisive role" in island reclamation projects in the South China Sea since late 2013 is the self-propelled cutter suction dredger the *Tianjing* (Shi 2014). The *Tianjing* was designed by Shanghai Jiaotong University and German engineering firm Vosta LMG and was built by China Merchants Heavy Industry Yard in Shenzhen between April 2008 to January 2010. At the time, the *Tianjing* was the third largest in the world and the largest in Asia. Besides, this dredger was equipped with the most powerful unearthing system in Asia and had the most advanced automatic control system in the world. Therefore, it was able to dredge to a depth of 30 metres and move 4,500 cubic metres of clay, compacted sand, gravel and rocks per hour. Since it has its own propulsion system, it can make its own way to the southern part of the South China Sea, while other non-self-propelled vessels need to be towed (Dolven et al. 2015, 18; Shi 2014; TJHDJ 2014; SJTU 2010b; 2010a).

In short, with the advanced dredging technologies, China's massive reclamation, construction and subsequent militarisation activities aim to strengthen its physical presence and control over the Spratly portion of the South China Sea (F. Zhang 2017, 446), thereby compelling other claimants to accept Chinese claims in the South China Sea. The ultimate aim, as Feng Zhang (2017, 453) puts it, is to compel the region to accept the regional order that will emerge from the realisation of these claims.

9.3. China's Spratly Islands land reclamation, 2013–2015 and militarisation in the South China Sea, 2016–present

The following section will trace China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the form of island reclamation and construction in the South China Sea starting in late 2013. The period under examination is divided into three phases: the first phase from late 2013 to early August 2014, the second phase from August 2014 to August 2015, the last phase from September 2015 up to present. The purpose of the section is to highlight unconventional measures employed by China and to assess the extent to which China achieved its objectives.

9.3.1. The first phase: late 2013–early August 2014

In mid-December 2013, the *Tianjing*, a 127-metre-long and self-propelled cutter suction dredger operated by the subsidiary of the state-owned China Communications Construction Company Tianjin Dredging, started dredging at Johnson South Reef. Images from the South China Research Forum showed a PLAN frigate guarding the operation (Green et al. 2017, 240–41; Diola 2014e). The reclamation work at Johnson South Reef was completed in early March 2014 (DJ Sta 2014) and in less than three months, it created a new harbour and 27 acres of new land (US DOD 2016, 15; Green et al. 2017, 241; AMTI 2017b; PHDFA 2014b).

On 4 March 2014, the Tianjing arrived at Cuarteron Reef and began land reclamation. The Tianjing left the reef a few days later and then returned to Cuarteron from 10 April to 22 May. During this period of time, 61 acres of new land were created at Cuarteron (US DOD 2016, 18; Green et al. 2017, 241; AMTI 2017a).

At Hughes Reef, the Tianjing conducted land reclamation operations from 20 March to 3 April 2014. At the end of the operation, the originally low-tide elevation had another 18 acres of new land (US DOD 2016, 16; Green et al. 2017, 241; AMTI 2018a).

As soon as the land reclamation was completed at Cuarteron Reef on 22 May, the Tianjing dredger commenced dredging at a fourth site, Gaven Reef (Green et al. 2017, 243). By mid-June 2014, according to the Philippine officials and the surveillance photos, beside the Tianjing, there were another two dredgers and an ocean tug operating at Gaven Reef (DJ Sta 2014). When the reclamation operation was completed on 15 June 2014, a total of 36 acres of new land was added at Gaven Reef (US DOD 2016, 20; Green et al. 2017, 243).

In early June 2014, Chinese experts reported that China was planning to turn Fiery Cross Reef into a fully formed artificial island with a landing strip and seaport. The proposal was said to have been submitted to the Chinese central government, which would consider based on the reclamation progress at Johnson South Reef (Green et al. 2017, 243; Kwok and Chan 2014; Bacchi 2014). By 13 June 2014, according to a Philippine report, there was no reclamation activity at any of the three reefs: Fiery Cross, Subi or Mischief. However, the report raised the possibility that once the work was done at the other reefs, China would begin land reclamation at Fiery Cross or Subi Reef. Beijing might delay the operation at Mischief Reef, because any land reclamation activity at Mischief Reef could lead to a more aggressive diplomatic stance from Manila, thereby attracting more international attention (DJ Sta 2014).

The Philippine government did its best to draw international attention to China's land reclamation projects in the South China Sea, in order to impose a reputational cost on Beijing (Green et al. 2017, 242; Tiezzi 2014b). During the 24th ASEAN Summit in Myanmar, on 10 May 2014, the Philippines formally updated the ASEAN on China's activities (Green et al. 2017, 242; ASEAN 2014; T. A. Burgonio 2014). On 14 May, Manila called for an immediate stop of "provocative acts" by Beijing (Ng 2014; Quismundo and Ramos 2014). The next day, it released military surveillance pictures of Chinese land reclamation and called Chinese actions "destabilising" and "aggressive" as well as a violation of the 2002 DOC (Green et al. 2017, 242; Diola 2014d; AP 2014e). Within two months from April to June 2014, Manila filed four diplomatic protests with Beijing over land reclamation activities in disputed reefs (Green et al. 2017, 241; Ng 2014; AFP 2014e).

The Chinese diplomatic approach was composed of two aspects. On the one hand, the Chinese government did not provide any substantive comments on their reclamation work or on what the final product would be (Dolven et al. 2015, 13; Tiezzi 2014a). On the other hand, Beijing even put forward a diplomatic initiative to reassure regional nations.

In response to Manila's diplomatic protests over land reclamation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying simply asserted that "China has indisputable sovereignty over Nansha Islands, including Chigua Reef and the contiguous waters", and that "[w]hatever

construction China carries out on the reef is a matter entirely within the scope of China's sovereignty" (FMPRC 2014k). In mid-June 2014, Manila filed the fourth protest over the alleged land reclamation at Hughes Reef (AFP 2014e) and called all claimant states in the South China Sea to halt coercive activities, including construction and reclamation (Mogato and Murallos 2014). In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying merely called Chinese actions "appropriate moves" on the grounds that "the reefs were Chinese territory" (Mogato and Murallos 2014). After the U.S. put forward the moratorium proposal encouraging a voluntary construction freeze from claimant states in mid-July 2014, China did not react with an outright opposition (Green et al. 2017, 244). Rather, Beijing stated that "[i]t is regrettable that certain countries have intensified illegal presence with construction work and weaponry buildup" (FMPRC 2014r). Beijing also highlighted its commitment to go ahead with negotiation of the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea (FMPRC 2014r). In early August 2014, in ASEAN meetings with China and the broader ARF meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi rebuffed the Philippines' Triple Action Plan, that centred on a moratorium on an "immediate" basis, followed by a conclusion of a binding COC on an "intermediate" basis, and ultimately an arbitration process to resolve the South China Sea disputes (PHDFA 2014c). In a press conference, Wang Yi, however, said China could comply with the first two steps of the Philippines' Plan, but only if Manila first revoked the international arbitration (Venzon 2014). The Chinese Foreign Minister instead advocated adopting a "dual-track approach", in which disputes should be "addressed by countries directly concerned through friendly consultations and negotiations and in a peaceful way", and peace and stability in the South China Sea would be "jointly maintained by China and ASEAN countries" (FMPRC 2014u; Sutter and Huang 2014b, 63).

With regards to the reclamation work as well as Beijing's intentions behind building activities, the Chinese government still refrained from making substantive comments. Yi Xianliang, Deputy Head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Boundary and Ocean Affairs Departments, by early August dismissed reports about China's plan to build an air base on Fiery Cross Reef and reaffirmed that China built "small and necessary construction" to "raise living conditions on the islands" (Blanchard 2014). Meanwhile, the government media remained comparatively quiet (Sutter and Huang 2014b).

9.3.2. Acceleration phase of land reclamation and construction, August 2014–August 2015

Despite Yi Xianliang's refusal of the report on China's reclamation and construction plan at Fiery Cross Reef, a commercial satellite imagery on 8 August 2014 captured one Chinese dredger working on the reef. The number of dredgers then increased to three by September and to six by November 2014, along with a large number of barges and support vessels (Green et al. 2017, 245). With about 665 acres of new land reclaimed, Fiery Cross Reef was transformed into an artificial island, which is three times larger than the formerly largest feature of the Spratlys, Itu Aba (Green et al. 2017, 246; US DOD 2016, 19; Rapp-Hooper 2015a). On 20 November, China's project at Fiery Cross Reef gained significant attention after *Jane's Defence Weekly* revealed new details of construction and reclamation work at the reef. The reef's large size stirred a speculation that it could host China's first airstrip in the Spratlys (Green et al. 2017, 246; Hardy and O'Connor 2014; AFP 2014g; Fonbuena 2015a). By autumn 2014, Beijing had largely completed reclamation at four reefs – Johnson South, Cuarteron, Hughes and Gaven – with less than 150 acres of new land added in total. Satellite imagery showed fully dredged channels, port facilities, and seawalls, as

well as initial infrastructure development already under way at all of these outposts (Green et al. 2017, 245–46).

On the diplomatic front, Beijing used carefully measured language to rebuff complaints from other claimants and the U.S. (Sutter and Huang 2015b, 57). At the same time, China signalled a neighbourly approach with a host of positive economic initiatives to the region.

Chinese leaders tended to leave publicising construction issues and South China Sea disputes to lower-level officials (Sutter and Huang 2015b, 57). In September 2014, when asked explicitly about the purpose of the construction, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying argued for the first time that the work was "mainly for the purpose of improving the working and living conditions of people stationed on these islands" (FMPRC 2014v). After the *Jane's Defence* report was released, the Chinese Foreign Ministry defended the projects by claiming that the construction would enable Chinese citizens working there to "better perform international obligations in terms of search, rescue and other public services" (R. Chua 2014; Hunt 2014; AP 2014h). However, Chinese officials began providing some insights into Chinese intentions for use of artificial island and new facilities constructed there. At the Xiangshan Forum, a Beijing national security conference in November 2014, Jin Zhirui, a colonel with the Chinese Air Force Command said that "there is a need for a base to support our radar system and intelligence-gathering activities", adding that China needs "a base of operations in the South China Sea for state security and to protect national interests" (Green et al. 2017, 246; Brunnstrom 2014b; Cloud 2015).

China simultaneously stepped up efforts to cement ties with small Southeast Asian neighbours with a number of economic initiatives (Parameswaran 2015a). On 24 October 2014, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was launched in Beijing with China as the largest shareholder of the institution (B. Goh 2014; Reuters and AFP 2015). The following month, China declared 2015 as "the year of ASEAN-China maritime cooperation" and claimed that it would use 2015 to carry out projects under the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund, which was established by Beijing in 2012 (Parameswaran 2015a). Also, at the 10–11 November APEC meeting in Beijing, Xi Jinping broached creating a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) (Sutter and Huang 2015a, 59). In December 2014, President Xi delivered an important speech at the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs and emphasised China's special focus on its policy towards Southeast Asian and other neighbouring countries (FMPRC 2014w; Cheng-Chwee 2017, 179; Sutter and Huang 2015a, 57; Parameswaran 2015a). The end of that month witnessed the establishment of a 40 billion USD China Silk Road Fund under direct Chinese control (Sutter and Huang 2015b, 58). It is worth noting that these positive agendas were put forward by China in the aftermath of the oil rig crisis with Vietnam during the summer of 2014 and in the midst of a growing regional concern over the artificial islands and construction projects conducted by China in the maritime heart of Southeast Asia. According to some, Beijing might try to change tactics, or at the very least, cool things down a little in the South China Sea (Parameswaran 2015a).

At the scene, China continued with its island-building and construction operations in both the Spratlys and Paracels. In the Spratly Islands, at the beginning of 2015, China embarked on two new reclamation projects at Mischief and Subi Reefs, the scale of which was even larger than that at Fiery Cross (US DOD 2016, 14, 17; Green et al. 2017, 247). Imagery taken on 25 January

showed multiple dredgers at both Mischief and Subi Reefs (Green et al. 2017, 247; AMTI 2017c; 2018b). In April 2015, the scale of the undertaking was described: "Satellite imagery shows a minimum of 23 dredgers operating at Mischief on 13 April, along with at least two dozen other large construction-related vessels within the lagoon formed by the circular reef. In that day's satellite image, 28 concrete transport/mixing trucks can be seen, in addition to dozens of other large trucks and dozens of backhoes" (V. R. Lee 2015b; Hayton 2018a, 52). As for the Paracels, satellite images taken in mid-March 2015 showed a major expansion of its runway and airport facilities. A 2,400-metre airstrip was extended to 2,920 metres and additional land reclamation was also performed on Woody Island (V. R. Lee 2015a). By late May 2015, according to the U.S., China had already claimed 1,500 acres of land for the first half of 2015 alone (Wee and Brunnstrom 2015). In early July 2015, as satellite images show, China also almost finished its 3,000-metre runway on Fiery Cross Reef. This runway is believed to be capable of supporting all kinds of Chinese military aircraft (Green et al. 2017, 250–51; O. Holmes 2015; *ABC News* 2015).

In early 2015, when the Chinese began reclamation work at Subi and Mischief Reef, Philippine Foreign Secretary del Rosario acknowledged that the Philippines had no plan for any direct interference with China's land reclamation or construction operations (Green et al. 2017, 247; Laguatan 2015). As China's reclamation activities had no sign of abating in late March 2015, the Philippine foreign secretary announced that Manila would resume the "repair and maintenance" in the Spratlys, including renovating Thitu Island's airstrip (Green et al. 2017, 249; Parameswaran 2015b). From Vietnamese side, in January 2015, Vietnam joined the Philippines in condemning China's attempts to build islands in the Spratly Islands and demanded that China "immediately stop such reclamation work" (Dien 2015). In March and May 2015, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson again raised opposition to China's expansion and construction activities, which Vietnam said violated its sovereignty and defied the DOC (*Thanhvien News* 2015; T. Tran 2015). At the same time, Vietnam also engaged in upgrading its outposts in the area. As of June 2015, Vietnam created approximately 80 acres of new land (US DOD 2015b, 16)⁵⁴.

The Chinese government did not comment substantively on the work until March 2015 and did not offer any explanation of its intentions for the use of the artificial islands until April 2015 (Dolven et al. 2015, 13). In response to regional pressure, on 8 March 2015, the first senior-level statement on land reclamation in the Spratly Islands came out when Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi explained that China was carrying out "necessary construction on its own islands and reefs" (FMPRC 2015a). He called Chinese activities "lawful and justified" and added that China would not "accept criticism from others [who] engage in illegal construction" (FMPRC 2015a). Wang Yi also stated that the construction "does not target or affect anyone" nor affect the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (FMPRC 2015a; Paul 2016, 14; Green et al. 2017, 248). He, however, did not comment on what Beijing planned to do with the new artificial islands. A month later, responding to a growing regional condemnation after the release of new satellite images of Chinese reclamation work, Beijing gave its first-ever detailed clarification of the intentions for the use of the artificial islands (Green et al. 2017, 249). On 9 April 2015, Chinese Foreign Ministry enumerated the "main purposes" for what it called "maintenance and construction work". The list

⁵⁴ According to AMTI's report released in May 2016, just over 120 acres were reclaimed at 10 reefs and islets out of 21 features occupied by Vietnam in the Spratlys. Most of the reclamations were at Spratly Island, Southwest Cay, Sin Cowe Island, and West Reef. The majority of this work took place in 2014 and 2015 (AMTI 2016b; 2015a; Thayer 2017a).

includes "improving the living and working conditions of personnel stationed there, better safeguarding territorial sovereign and maritime rights and interests", "better performing China's international responsibility and obligation in maritime search and rescue, disaster prevention and mitigation", and "marine science and research, meteorological observation, environmental protection, navigation safety, fishery production service" (FMPRC 2015b). Importantly, Beijing officially acknowledged for the first time that besides meeting civilian demands, the islands and reefs aim to satisfy "the need of necessary military defence" (FMPRC 2015b; Dolven et al. 2015, 13; Glaser 2015c). Besides, Beijing had more criticism to make about other claimants' reclamation activities. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei accused them of carrying out "illegal" building work in the Spratlys. He listed specific facilities built by Vietnam, the Philippines, such as docks, runways, missile positions, barracks, hotels, lighthouses and helipads, airports and wharfs and demanded that these countries "immediately stop their infringements on China's sovereignty and rights" (Blanchard 2015).

On 16 June 2015, the Chinese Foreign Ministry held a special press conference to deliver the message that "the land reclamation project of China's construction on some stationed islands and reefs" would "be completed in the upcoming days" (FMPRC 2015c). However, Beijing also added another part, which is as important as the first one. The second part reads that after the land reclamation, China would "start the building of facilities to meet relevant functional requirements" (F. Zhang 2015; FMPRC 2015c). On 6 August 2015, during the Foreign Ministers' Meetings of the East Asia Summit and ARF, Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that China had halted its land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. He then reaffirmed that "next, we will build facilities [...]" (FMPRC 2015e). These announcements, as many observers point out, came just before the seventh U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue held on 23–24 June in Washington and the Summit between Chinese President Xi and U.S. President Obama in September 2015. They likely aimed at creating a "more congenial environment" for the meetings (F. Zhang 2015). Therefore, they did not mark a change with respect to China's activities or its overall position (Green et al. 2015).

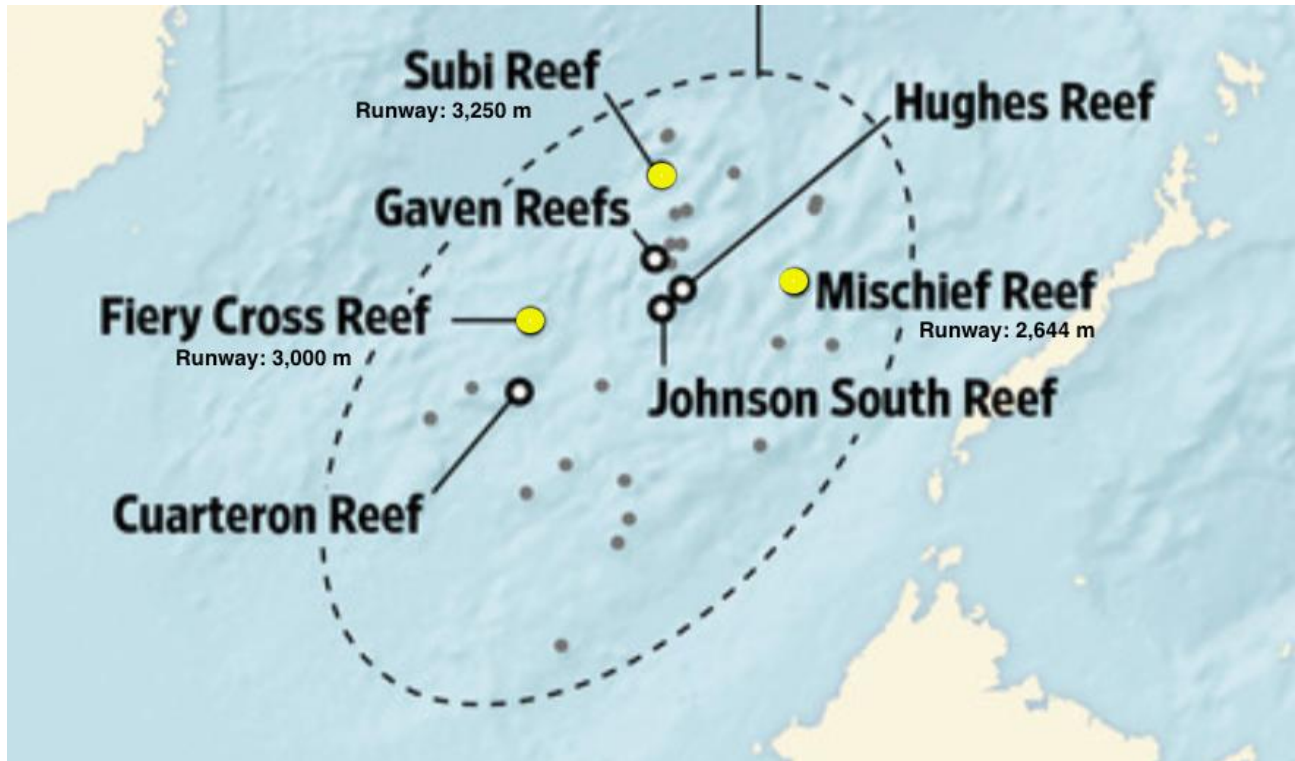


Figure 8: **China's seven outposts and sites of land reclamation in the Spratly Islands**

Source: The Wall Street Journal, AMTI/CSIS

9.3.3. *Building facilities and militarisation, September 2015–*

Despite Beijing's announcement of the completion of its reclamation work in the Spratly Islands in August, land reclamation at Mischief Reef and Subi Reef in fact continued into September and October 2015 (Green et al. 2017, 251; Poling 2015b; Glaser 2015d). Between August to late October 2015, China reclaimed more than 100 additional acres of land (Clapper 2016). By September 2015, approximately 1,408 acres of new land were reclaimed at Mischief Reef, while Subi Reef was expanded from 0.6 acres to 1,014 acres by October 2015 (US DOD 2016, 14, 17; Green et al. 2017, 247). Whereas imagery released early September confirmed the second runway construction at Subi Reef, satellite photos in mid-September revealed Chinese preparatory work for the third airfield at Mischief Reef (Green et al. 2017, 251; Poling 2015b). The airstrips built on Fiery Cross and Subi Reef now have become the longest airstrips in the Spratlys.⁵⁵

On 25 September 2015, in a joint press conference with President Obama at the White House, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that the "relevant construction activities that China [is]

⁵⁵ A hearing by Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on safeguarding American interests in the East and South China Sea, on May 13, 2015. See full text in (O'Rourke 2015, 74–75).

Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan each have one airstrip. According to AMTI, the former longest airstrip in the Spratlys was built by Malaysia at Swallow Reef, which is 1,368 metres long. Taiwan's recently-renovated airstrip is 1,195 metres long. The Philippines' runway on Thitu Island is 1,000 metres long, while that of Vietnam in Spratly Island is only 550 metres long (AMTI 2015c; 2016a).

undertaking in the Nansha Islands do not impact or target any country". He also added that "China does not intend to pursue militarisation" (White House 2015). According to some observers, Xi's words were a statement about intentions, not a promise. Also, it was unclear what President Xi meant by "militarisation" (Glaser and Vitello 2016, 33; Green et al. 2017, 252; Stashwick 2018). In October 2015, when asked about regional concern regarding China's militarisation in artificial islands and reefs, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson denied militarisation, claiming that "[t]here is no such thing of China militarising relevant islands and reefs" (LaGrone 2015b; *Xinhua* 2015). She, however, added that "[t]here certainly are a limited amount of necessary military facilities for defence purposes only" (LaGrone 2015b; *Xinhua* 2015). On 20 January 2016, speaking with U.S. Chief of Naval Operations John Richardson on a teleconference, Chinese Naval Commander Wu Shengli dismissed that China's building on islands and reefs in the Spratly Islands could be considered as militarisation. Instead, he characterised it as "necessary" and "defensive" (Blanchard 2016). He stated that "[w]e will certainly not seek the militarisation of the islands and reef, but we won't not set up defenses" and added that "[h]ow many defenses completely depends on the level of threat we face" (Blanchard 2016).

On the ground, three of seven artificial islands in the Spratlys – Fiery Cross, Subi, and Mischief Reef – are designed as military bases (Perlez 2016; Shugart 2016). In early February 2016, commercial satellite imagery indicated Chinese deployment of two batteries of eight *Hongqi* (HQ)-9 surface-to-air missile launchers on Woody Island in the disputed Paracels (*Guancha* 2016; C. H. Wong and Lubold 2016; Heath 2016). The AMTI also reported that China had begun installing a high-frequency radar system on Cuarteron Reef. The report also pointed to "probable" radars at Gaven, Hughes and Johnson South Reef and helipads, and to possible gun emplacements at Gaven and Hughes Reefs (Brunnstrom 2016). In March 2016, a Chinese military website posted a purported detailed dredging plan for Scarborough Shoal (Thayer 2017b). That same month, Chinese survey ships were spotted around Scarborough Shoal (Poling and Cooper 2016). However, no Chinese dredging or construction activity at Scarborough Shoal have been reported so far. In April 2016, a PLA Air Force aircraft landed on Fiery Cross in the Spratly Islands for the first time, ostensibly to evacuate three sick workers (Green et al. 2017, 254; *Xinhua* 2016a).

Militarisation activities by China in the outposts under its control have still been taking place. In April 2018, China was also reported to take a significant step by installing military jamming equipment to Fiery Cross and Mischief Reef (Gordon and Page 2018). One month later, in May 2018, it was reported that China secretly installed anti-ship cruise missiles *YJ-12B* and long-range surface-to-air missiles *HQ-9B* on Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef (Johnson 2018; Stashwick 2018; Macias 2018). The installations marked the first Chinese missile deployments and they were the first missiles installed in the Spratly Islands (Brunnstrom 2018). Also, in May 2018, according to *China Daily*, China deployed its most advanced bomber aircraft *H-6K* for the first time on Woody Island in the Paracel Islands. During the deployment, the PLA Air Force conducted takeoff and landing training with strategic bombers in the South China Sea (Zhao 2018; AP 2018) .

9.3.4. *China's fait accompli and the coercive nature*

By completing the work largely in a matter of months, China presents the region with a *fait accompli* (Poling 2015a). Chinese reclamation and construction work at the contested reefs under its control in the South China Sea stands out from that of other claimants and is considered as a

coercive and status quo-changing attempt for several reasons. First, China's reclamation and construction work is unprecedented and far outstrips that of any other claimants in terms of means, scale, speed and nature (Dolven et al. 2015, 4, 20; O'Rourke 2015, 73; Paul 2016, 13). China is the first country to employ island-building technologies to transform disputed features in fully formed islands, which serve as military bases in the South China Sea (Chase and Purser 2015). As of June 2015, China reclaimed more than 2,900 acres of land. By comparison, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan have reclaimed approximately 80, 70, 14 and eight acres respectively. China has reclaimed 17 times more land in 20 months than the other claimants combined over the past 40 years, accounting for approximately 95 percent of all reclaimed land in the Spratly Islands (US DOD 2015b, 16). Moreover, according to Mira Rapp-Hooper (2015a) at the AMTI, what sets China's activities apart is that while other claimants have built upon or modified existing land masses, Beijing has dramatically changed the size and structure of physical land features.

Second, Tran Truong Thuy (2017, 168) notes that many Chinese assertive behaviours, such as the deployment of the oil rig HYSY 981, were worrisome, but it was brief, and the situation quickly normalised. Chinese land reclamation operations in disputed features in the Paracel and Spratly Islands "[have] alter[ed] the status quo permanently and [have] far-reaching strategic implications for the whole region".

Third, Andrew Erickson (2015) points out that Beijing does not need a 3,000-metre runway "to support evacuation of personnel for medical or weather emergencies [...]". According to him, "such a runway is only needed to support a full range of military options". While other countries have worked "to project power to contested South China Sea features, with the airstrip as the one built on Fiery Cross Reef, China worked to project power from them" (Chase and Purser 2015). Some observers consider these activities to be, in and of themselves, a coercive tactic (Chase and Purser 2015).

Last but not least, Koh Swee Lean Collin (2015) notes that land reclamation and subsequent fortification of the islands by China is akin to what James Cable would classify as a form of definitive application of coercion at sea. According to James Cable (1994, 21–22), the victim's options are confined to acquiescence, ineffectual resistance or a retaliation that can only follow, and not prevent, the achievement of the desired result. In a similar manner, China left other claimants and the U.S. to choose between either accepting a new status quo with seven reinforced outposts in disputed features and stronger control of the Spratly Islands by China or confronting China militarily. The contending claimants can by no means reverse the situation without escalating in a military retaliation. *Fait accompli*, which was created by unprecedented scale and exceptional speed, thus itself is coercive.

9.3.5. Outcome: An evaluation

With the support of the primary weapons of the *Tianjing* and a fleet of dredgers, only in a matter of months, China presented the whole region with a *fait accompli* of fully formed artificial islands in the South China Sea. Subsequently, China fortified these outposts and even deployed missiles and other military equipment. China's *fait accompli* confronted other claimants with a choice between giving in and risking a larger conflict. The only feasible way to physically overturn this *fait accompli* would be to capture the islands. But no other claimant risked to escalating the dispute into a military confrontation (Collin Koh 2015). China successfully created a new status quo in the

South China Sea without triggering military confrontation or direct interference into China's reclamation and construction work.

In contrast to other incidents and crises, in this case, there is no single and direct target states of China's maritime coercive diplomacy, which was executed in the form of creating a fait accompli of reinforced outposts and military bases in disputed areas. Instead, the target includes other claimants, other regional states, and the U.S. By strengthening its presence, control over and its operational capabilities in the Spratlys, as aforementioned, China aims to coerce other disputants into relinquishing their claims (Hardy and O'Connor 2014), and compel regional states to accept the order emerging from the realisation of Chinese claims in the South China Sea. Although other claimants have not dropped their claims over the Spratly Islands and have continued to challenge China's claims in the South China Sea, they and the U.S. have had no choice but to accept a new status quo with seven artificial islands in the Spratlys – three of which have been in completion to become air and naval bases (AMTI 2017d) – and China's greater presence and control in the disputed sea by China.

To some extent, Beijing did pay a high price for its fait accompli in the form of island-building, construction and deployment activities in disputed features in the South China Sea. On 12 July 2016, the Tribunal issued its Award. The Tribunal ruled, among other things, that three of the Spratly features that China occupies, namely Hughes Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef, are submerged at high tide in their natural condition and thus generate no entitlement to maritime zones (PCA 2016b, 9; 2016a). By constructing installations and artificial islands at Mischief Reef, China violated the Philippines' sovereign rights with respect to the latter's EEZ and continental shelf (PCA 2016b, 10). The Tribunal found that China's large-scale land reclamation and construction of artificial islands had violated its obligations to refrain from aggravating or extending the Parties' disputes during dispute resolution proceedings. In addition, China's construction activities destroyed evidence of the natural condition of features in question in the South China Sea (PCA 2016b, 10–11). Also, the Tribunal concluded that China had caused permanent and irreparable harm to the marine environment (PCA 2016b, 11). Because of these coercive efforts, the dispute was internationalised and the regional and international community condemned China's destabilising behaviour. Nevertheless, Chinese scholar Zhou Fangyin (2016, 888) notes that "the counter-measures of the other claimants have been mostly diplomatic, combined with attempts to attract the attention of the international community". Other experts even point out that "the high price seems to be acceptable to Beijing – the cost is more reputational than substantial, while China has realised realistic gains in the South China Sea" (You 2017, 9). Feng Zhang (2018, 198) however emphasises that "it needs to be seen whether the groundwork laid by China's massive island-building will help it compel others to accommodate to China's interests in the South China Sea and accept the maritime order in the region or not".

9.4. Explaining the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

This section examines three factors, namely the asymmetry of power and motivation and the U.S.' reaction, and highlights the impact of these factors on the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

9.4.1. *The asymmetry of power and motivation*

From the outset, regarding the asymmetry of motivation, other claimants, such as Vietnam and the

Philippines, did not possess an advantage. First, with the exception of China's building at Mischief Reef, under international law, land reclamation is not strictly illegal. Even later, in the South China Sea Arbitration Award, Robert Beckman notes that there is nothing in the decision which would make it unlawful for China to construct military installations on the disputed islands that it occupies (Beckman 2016, 7). Also, the Tribunal did not rule that it was unlawful in principle for China to undertake construction activities on the contested features. Nor did the Tribunal discuss whether it was lawful for China to change the status quo in the South China Sea by building airstrips and other facilities on these reefs (Beckman 2016, 7).

Second, other claimants and ASEAN in general were in no position to confront China due to either their inferiority in military capabilities or their interests in stabilising the relationship with China. For the Philippines, there is no question that the military asymmetry between the two countries is massive (Wiegand and Beuck 2018, 6). Among its Asia Pacific neighbours, the Philippine military capability is among the weakest. The official military budget of the Philippines in 2015 was 441 million USD, 300 times smaller than that of China, 141 billion USD (Wiegand and Beuck 2018, 6; Rajagopalan and Wee 2015). Despite its diplomatic challenges, Manila had no intention of confronting China at sea. A presidential spokesperson once acknowledged that the Philippines would "not respond to provocative action, especially [through] military action" (AFP 2014d). Instead, Manila resorted to the diplomatic mechanism as well as legal means (Green et al. 2017, 243; AFP 2014d; Bacchi 2014; Mogato and Murallos 2014).

On the part of Hanoi, from May to July 2014, as presented in Chapter Eight, Vietnam's efforts mainly focused on dealing with China's deployment of the HYSY 981 oil rig operating within its claimed EEZ and continental shelf. Despite deep concerns about China's massive island reclamation activities and particularly about future military usage of these artificial islands, for its overall policy towards China, Hanoi was determined to reset their bilateral relations with Beijing and re-establish a framework of cooperative relationships with Beijing following the oil rig crisis (Sutter and Huang 2015b). After China withdrew the giant oil rig in July 2014, on 26–27 August, Vietnam sent a special envoy of the Secretary General of the VCP, Le Hong Anh, to Beijing to meet with Chinese leaders. During Le Hong Anh's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, both sides agreed to take measures to "restore and enhance bilateral relations in all fields" (T. T. Tran 2017, 171; *Tuotire News* 2014g). This visit was followed by a number of meetings between two countries' leaders and high-ranking officials. During the unexpected three-day visit of Vietnamese Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh to Beijing in mid-October 2014, China and Vietnam signed a technical memorandum of understanding on establishing direct communication lines between their respective ministries (T. T. Tran 2017, 171–72; Thayer 2014g). On 27 October, another high-level visit took place involving State Councilor Yang Jiechi, who co-hosted the 7th Joint Steering Committee meeting in Hanoi. During the meeting, the two sides agreed to reset their relations and work out a crisis management mechanism. The following month, the presidents of China and Vietnam met on the sideline of the APEC summit in Beijing (Thayer 2015a, 11; 2015b). In April 2015, Vietnam's Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong visited Beijing and the two sides pledged to strengthen ties between the two Parties and countries (*Nhandan Online* 2015). In spite of concerns over China's island-building and construction works, through these exchanges, Hanoi demonstrated its commitment to overcome tensions caused by the HYSY 981 crisis and re-establish cooperative relations with China (Thayer 2015b). To some extent, Vietnam downplayed Chinese land reclamation activities (Thayer 2015c).

On ASEAN's side, separately, Malaysia's Foreign Minister at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Malaysia on 27 January 2015 noted explicitly "the concern raised by some foreign ministers on land reclamation in the South China Sea" (Green et al. 2017, 247; Sim 2015). Singapore also issued a joint statement with the U.S. urging all parties to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities, including land reclamation, in the South China Sea (Green et al. 2017, 248; US DOS 2015). However, as a group, there was no sign of a unified voice to address the issue. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' joint statement on the South China Sea in May 2014 did not name China or single out its land reclamation for criticism (Green et al. 2017, 242; ASEAN 2014; T. A. Burgonio 2014). In August 2014, the Philippines came up with the Triple Action Plan initiative, ASEAN as an organisation merely "noted" it in its joint communiqué (Kuok 2014, 6). At the 27 April ASEAN Summit in 2015, although the joint statement stated that the heads of state "share the serious concerns expressed by some leaders on the land reclamation undertaken in the South China Sea, which has eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace, security, and stability" (ASEAN 2015a), the statement still refrained from mentioning China by name. More importantly, the joint statement also did not contain Hanoi and Manila's demand for an immediate halt to Chinese reclamation and construction activities (Green et al. 2017, 249; ASEAN 2015a; Mogato and Menon 2015). The joint communiqué on 4 August 2015 at the annual ARF in Malaysia went no further than the April ASEAN Summit. The chairman's statement only urged self-restraint (Green et al. 2017, 251; ASEAN 2015b; Lefevre and Leong 2015).

In contrast, the asymmetry of motivation, which was fixed in the nature of the disputes and was created by China, was apparently in China's favour. First, as previous sections present, China's willingness to made gains by a *fait accompli* was strongly backed by its capacity, budget and political support. Second, it was confident that other claimants would avoid confrontation with China due to its superior numbers of military and paramilitary vessels and the economic dependence of these countries on China (Storey 2014, 4). The overwhelming military imbalance in favour of China might have made Chinese leaders believe that there would be little small neighbours could do to stop it. Many Chinese analysts believe "the stakes are relatively low" when forcefully asserting claims (ICG 2015, 11). In case of Vietnam, the limits of its reaction derive not only from the unbridgeable gap in terms of military capabilities but also from its overall policy towards China, particularly after the oil rig crisis. Su Xiaohui, of the Department of International and Strategic Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, a Foreign Ministry-affiliated think-tank, notes that "[a]fter much drama, Vietnam has also clearly realised that while disputes in the South China Sea will not be solved within a short period of time, it should not ignore the more important parts of their ties [...] because of the disputes" (Su 2015; People's Daily 2015). Kang Lin, an expert from the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, comments that "it is necessary for the VCP to handle ties with China the 'super neighbour' properly and not to allow the South China Sea issues to affect the overall situation of the ties, as it relates to the VCP's very existence [...]" (Kang 2015; Haiwainet 2015). About Vietnam and the Philippines' reaction, some Chinese experts comment that in fact, these "verbal barbs are more for show than anything else", since "[i]f Vietnam and the Philippines don't complain it will give impression they are giving in to China" (Dien 2015).

Third, China resorted to economic initiatives to create an asymmetry of motivation in its favour. According to Feng Zhang (2018, 198), Chinese policymakers assess that in principle, no

country in Southeast Asia wants a bad relationship with China, and thus all countries are amenable to rewards and inducements. In other words, China seems to have been confident that the associated costs to its image and reputation could be offset by positive economic agendas and ambitious benefit-sharing initiatives presented to the region. Thus, while conducting the massive island-building projects, China primarily issued carefully measured statements and, importantly, actively sought to expand its economic engagement with ASEAN members. A prominent Chinese scholar, Yan Xuetong from Tsinghua University bluntly puts it, "[f]or China, we need good relationships more urgently than we need economic development. We let them [small countries] benefit economically, and in return we get good relationships" (*Nikkei Asian Review* 2015). In other words, the policy is to "purchase" the good political relationships (*Nikkei Asian Review* 2015). As Feng Zhang (2018, 199) notes, "by combining coercion with inducement, China believes no regional backlash will be unmanageable". Respectively in June and December 2015, Vietnam and the Philippines became founding members of the Chinese-backed AIIB (T. T. Tran 2017, 172; *The Saigon Times Daily* 2015; Reuters 2015; Tiezzi 2015b).

9.4.2. U.S.' reaction and China's risk calculation

The U.S. stepped up its engagement in the maritime tension by explicitly criticising China for the island-building, construction and deployment activities, putting forwards specific suggestions to reduce tensions, better publicising Chinese activities to the region and the world, enhancing capabilities of allies and partners, and bolstering U.S. military presence (Glaser 2014, 54).

The United States weighed in for the first time at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue on 31 May 2014, when U.S. Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel criticised China for undertaking "destabilising and unilateral actions", including land reclamation at multiple locations (Green et al. 2017, 243). Secretary Hagel reiterated the U.S.' policy of taking no position on competing territorial claims, but firmly opposed "any nation's use of intimidation, coercion, or the threat of force to assert those claims" (US DOD 2014). Washington continued to explicitly criticise China and adopted tougher rhetoric in the second half of 2014 and throughout 2015 (Glaser 2014, 54). In his speech at the G20 Summit in Australia in mid-November 2014, President Obama said the U.S. would continue to deepen its diplomatic and military engagement in Asia and would work to ensure that big nations do not "bully the small". He also singled out China, saying China would have to play by the same rules as its neighbours. President Obama also reiterated the U.S. support to ASEAN's effort to reach a COC with China "that reinforces international law in the South China Sea" (Brumfield 2014; Hunt 2014). After massive island reclamation gained great attention in November 2014, the U.S. said "large-scale construction [...] would seem to complicate or escalate the situation" and continued to call on China to "stop its land reclamation programme, and to engage in diplomatic initiatives to encourage all sides to restrain themselves" (Hunt 2014; Chan 2014; AFP 2014g). When China began two massive reclamation projects at Mischief and Subi Reefs in January 2015, the U.S. expressed concern about Chinese behaviour considered to be "rais[ing] tensions" and "questions about China's intentions" (AFP 2015a; Fonbuena 2015b). On 29 May 2015, the U.S. Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter stated that the U.S. was "deeply concerned about the pace and scope" of China's land reclamation in the South China Sea and the prospect of further militarisation (Carter 2015). Secretary Carter reiterated the call for "an immediate and lasting halt to land reclamation by all claimants" (Carter 2015). He added that "[t]he U.S. will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows [...]" and that "will not be deterred from exercising these rights" (Rosenberg 2015a; 2015b; Carter 2015).

To try to stop China from continuing its land reclamation, the Obama administration suggested that all claimant states freeze their building on disputed features (Perlez 2014c). On 11 July 2014, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Michael Fuchs proposed a voluntary freeze on "certain actions and activities that escalate the disputes and cause instability" (Fuchs 2014). He suggested the application of such a freeze on the establishment of new outposts, construction, land reclamation and other types of alterations that "fundamentally change the nature, size, or capabilities" of existing outposts, whereas "routine maintenance operations would be permissible" (Fuchs 2014). At the annual ARF in August 2014 held in Naypyidaw, Myanmar, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry proposed that claimants should voluntarily and jointly "freeze" activities that would "complicate or escalate disputes".

In addition, the U.S. was also engaged in efforts to impose reputational costs on China (USCC 2015, 472). To better publicise China's island-building activities and other actions in the area to the public and governments in the region and the world, on 20 May 2015, a U.S. Navy *P-8A* reconnaissance plane with a CNN crew on board carried out flights near China's reclamation sites (Rosenberg 2015a). The Chinese Navy issued warnings eight times for the U.S. aircraft to "leave immediately" and gave notice that the aircraft was "approaching our military alert zone". Pentagon spokespersons noted that the U.S. would continue these "nearly daily" reconnaissance flights to exercise the right to operate in international airspace (Green et al. 2017, 250; Cooper and Perlez 2015; Sciutto 2015; Denyer 2015).

The U.S. also engaged in efforts to strengthen alliances and enhance the maritime capabilities of allies and partners. In late May 2015, Secretary Carter announced a new 425-million-USD maritime security initiative to help countries in Southeast Asia improve their naval and coast guard capabilities (Carter 2015; AMTI 2015b; Parameswaran 2015c). During Defence Secretary Ash Carter's visit to Vietnam in early June 2015, the U.S. pledged 18 million USD to help Vietnam buy fast patrol boats for its Coast Guard force (Alexander 2015; Simon 2015, 56).

Part of the U.S. efforts involves undertaking deterrent manoeuvres at sea. In February 2015, the U.S. deployed the *P-8A* – its most advanced naval surveillance plane – to the Philippines for three weeks. The *P-8A* took off from the airbase in the Philippines, conducting for the first time reconnaissance and patrol over the South China Sea (Mogato 2015a). On 27 October 2015, a U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer, the USS *Lassen*, conducted a freedom of navigation patrol and passed within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef.

Despite these efforts, the U.S. involvement in general and its deterrent signals in particular suffered a number of limitations. First, regarding the U.S. proposal of "voluntary freeze" put forward by Secretary Kerry at the ARF in August 2014, ASEAN ministers did not even discuss it at their meeting. The ASEAN Secretary-General, Le Luong Minh, stated that the group already had a plan to restrict potentially provocative actions, such as land reclamation and building on disputed features, and that "[i]t is up to ASEAN to encourage China to achieve a serious and effective implementation of this commitment, rather than ASEAN asking whether it should support or not support the [U.S.] proposal" (Mooney and Wroughton 2014; Gallucci 2014; Kuok 2014, 5–7; Corben 2014; Green et al. 2017, 245). Privately, officials revealed that some member states took umbrage at not being consulted by the U.S. prior to making them public (Kuok 2014, 6).

Second, with respect to its ties with allies, the 5th U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue was held in January 2015, when the Chinese began a new and unprecedented round of island-building at the Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef. The Dialogue, however, made clear that the two allies would eschew direct confrontation with Beijing. The U.S. instead was in favour of support for Manila's defence modernisation programme, joint maritime exercises and foreign military financing (Green et al. 2017, 247; AFP 2015a). Nevertheless, according to Zach Abuza, there was "very little tangible" coming out of that Strategic Dialogue, since there were no new pledges of aid and assistance, no weapons transfers, no new policies or programmes. Abuza points out that "[t]he U.S. might have been concerned about the rapid reclamation...but it doesn't seem to be willing to do anything to stop it", and that "leaves the Philippines with nothing else but their legal and diplomatic strategy" (Dien 2015). Later, it became clear that the land reclamation in the Mischief Reef was the largest project conducted by China, with 1,408 acres of reclaimed land (US DOD 2016, 14).

Third, despite reconnaissance flights and a freedom of navigation operation in October 2015 conducted by the U.S. Navy in disputed areas in the South China Sea, according to experts, these deterrent signals were sent too late. In fact, at a hearing before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Assistant Secretary of Defence David Shear disclosed that the last time a U.S. warship passed within 12 nautical miles of a Chinese-claimed artificial island was in 2012. That means, after 2013, the U.S. did not directly challenge Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, as no U.S. warships did operate within 12 nautical miles of any Chinese-claimed territory. U.S. Pacific Command Commander Harry Harris also stated that the U.S. Navy had not recently conducted any "flyover" over Chinese-reclaimed land masses (Green et al. 2017, 251; Freedberg 2015a; Blanchard and Shalal 2015). The U.S. military aircraft conducted flights on daily basis, but did not penetrate the 12-nautical-mile zone of the Chinese-reclaimed reefs (Entous, Lubold, and Barnes 2015; Denyer 2015).

The 12-nautical-mile limit in particular matters, because it is the extent of the territorial waters China claims to control around its artificial islands (Freedberg 2015a). The U.S. argues an artificial "feature" built over a submerged reef grants no legal rights to the surrounding waters or airspace. According to U.S. legislators, "continued failure to actually exercise that right [to go within the 12 nautical mile zone] could be interpreted as de facto acceptance of Beijing's destabilising behaviour" (Freedberg 2015a).

The U.S. finally undertook its first freedom of navigation patrol since 2013 at the end of October 2015, when the USS *Lassen* passed by the 12-nautical-mile limit of Subi Reef. The purpose of this operation, however, caused confusion among many observers (Shalal and Brunnstrom 2015). International law, as most nations interpret it, allows a warship to pass within the 12-nautical-mile boundary but not to conduct any military operations, like radiating its sensors or firing its weapons, in a transit known legally as "innocent passage" (LaGrone 2015a). The Chinese are often against any foreign military vessel passing through their territorial waters without prior permission. Although the USS *Lassen* itself did come within the 12-nautical-mile zone, its fire control radars were turned off and it flew no helicopters during the transit. The USS *Lassen* was accompanied by a P-8A surveillance aircraft, but the P-8A did not enter the 12-nautical-mile limit (Cavas 2015). The destroyer's behaviour seemed designed to conform to the UNCLOS's rules for innocent passage through territorial waters (Green et al. 2017, 253). Therefore, if the USS *Lassen* just sailed through and demonstrated innocent passage, it could tacitly be

perceived as a recognition of the territory as sovereign Chinese holdings (LaGrone 2015a). Two months after the operation, U.S. Department of Defence provided a clarification that Subi Reef is within 12 nautical miles of Sandy Cay, which is probably entitled to a territorial sea. Under UNCLOS, claimants to Sandy Cay can use Subi Reef as a starting point from which the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, and the EEZ can be measured. Therefore, this operation was not a challenge to China's claims of sovereignty over features but was designed to challenge policies by China requiring prior permission or notification of transit under innocent passage in their territorial sea (Carter 2016; Freund 2017; Green et al. 2017, 253).

According to Bonnie Glaser, the U.S. paid a price for delaying the conduct of such operations (Freedberg 2015b). Allowing a gap of three years in conducting these operations undermined the legitimacy of the very legal claims that the U.S. asserts to be upholding. The long-delayed operation, which might have been a routine and low-key freedom of navigation operations to set a legal precedent for access and might have even served as some soft kind of deterrence to China's reclamation and building activities, put the U.S. in what a retired U.S. Navy Commander called "a worse position strategically" (Freedberg 2015b). This operation put pressure on Chinese leaders to take a harder approach. As reported, people in official positions suggested that the PLA should open fire at U.S. forces if they entered the 12-nautical-mile zone around artificial island in the South China Sea (Freedberg 2015b). In fact, China only dispatched two PLAN vessels, a guided missile destroyer *Lanzhou* and a frigate *Taizhou* to shadow the USS *Lassen* and issue warnings to leave the waters around Subi, and they did not interfere with the *Lassen's* transit (*South China Morning Post* 2015; Glaser, Green, and Poling 2015). However, Beijing might use it as pretext for further militarisation in the South China Sea. After the USS *Lassen's* operation, China's Ministry of Defence called the U.S. patrol "a coercive action that seeks to militarise the South China Sea region" (Blanchard and Shalal 2015). Beijing accused the USS *Lassen* of "illegally" entering Chinese waters near islands and reefs and asserted that it would "resolutely respond to any country's deliberate provocations" (Blanchard and Shalal 2015). The Foreign Ministry suggested that this might include efforts to "increase and strengthen the building up of our relevant [defence] abilities" (Green et al. 2017, 253; Blanchard and Shalal 2015; Z. Zhang 2016).

Vis-à-vis the U.S., China made gains with a *fait accompli* of massive man-made islands right at the heart of the Southeast Asian sea, since Chinese leaders might have been motivated by three factors: a belief that the balance of resolve favoured China in the South China Sea; a calculation that they could get away with a new status quo if they could implement the island-building and construction projects in a quickest manner possible (P. Jennings 2015, 51); and finally, China's preparation to absorb the cost to its reputation.

From the Chinese perspective, the challenge for the U.S. is that while the South China Sea concerns China's strategic interests, few would think that these reefs in the Spratlys constitute U.S. core interests (B. Zhang 2015, 3; Manning and Przystup 2017). Admiral Wu Shengli, Commander of the Chinese Navy from 2005 to 2017, reportedly told the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John W. Richardson, that the South China Sea was a "core interest" that centred on the "foundation of the party's governance, the country's security and stability, and the Chinese nation's basic interests" (Perlez 2016; F. Zhang 2017, 449). For its part, the U.S. does not take a position on competing sovereignty claims and insists only that maritime disputes be handled on the basis of international law and without coercion or intimidation (US DOD 2015b, 2, 6; Martinson 2018, 3). The outcome of this contest means less to the United States than it does to China, which is

fighting for much more than abstract principles (Martinson 2018, 3). As Zhang Baohui at Lingnan University notes, the asymmetry in stakes gave China an advantage in the "balance of resolve" over the U.S. in the South China Sea (B. Zhang 2015, 3). That makes the Chinese confident, willing and able to go much further than the U.S. (Manning and Przystup 2017)

From the standpoint of the initiator, as Alexander George postulates, a *fait accompli* strategy is the most "rational" way to change the status quo when the initiator believes that a *fait accompli* could give the potential defending power little or no time to reconsider and reverse his policy of non-involvement or increase his interference (George and Smoke 1974, 537).

The U.S., in fact, ceased challenging China's claims by not conducting regular freedom of navigation operations within the 12-nautical-mile limit around the seven features under Chinese control in the Spratlys after 2013. Chinese analysts did not deny the fact that had the reclamation not been launched in late 2013, China might never have been able to do so because of the fast-changing external environment, including the intensified U.S. intervention (You 2017, 8). Zhou Fangyin notes that by quickly moving forward with the island-building and construction activities, China reduced uncertainty as well as the risk of extending the duration of confrontation. Also, according to Zhou, had China taken a gradual approach instead of a *fait accompli*, other claimants and particularly the U.S. could have afforded more opportunities to take counter-measures (F. Zhou 2016, 888). Admiral Wu Shengli, Commander of the PLAN, reportedly said in a speech to his naval colleagues that "[w]e didn't expect President Xi would give us such robust support, we didn't expect our engineering capacity would be so strong" (Perlez 2016). Importantly, he added that "we didn't expect the Americans would be *so slow to react* [emphasis added]" (Perlez 2016). It suggests that in the first place, Beijing might have believed that if it pursued a *fait accompli* to create a new status quo, Washington would have little time to adopt an effective policy of intervention, but China did expect some reaction from the U.S. According to a recent report from the National Bureau of Asian Research, Chinese leaders were indeed prepared for a more forceful reaction from the U.S. and might have recalibrated their activities as a consequence. But when there was no such response, the island-building campaign continued apace (Greenert 2018, 19). That explained why Chinese leaders decided to conduct land reclamation projects on a smaller scale at Johnson South, Hughes, Cuarteron and Gaven in the first phase. When the U.S. neither resumed its regular freedom of navigation operations within the 12-nautical-mile limit of Chinese-held features nor took a more robust reaction, China continued to accelerate the reclamation and construction in Fiery Cross, Mischief and Subi Reefs. By the time the U.S. finally decided to take action by sending the warship to enter the 12-nautical-mile zone of China-held features in October 2015, the major land reclamation activities were mostly finished (US DOD 2016, 13; Clapper 2016).

Lastly, during this course, with regard to the U.S.' tougher rhetoric in its criticism and a moratorium proposal, China believed it was just a way that "Washington is using the regional disputes to interfere in regional affairs to salvage its waning influence in the Asia-Pacific". All what it considered as "irresponsible remarks" (AFP 2014g) from top U.S. politicians marked "a renewed U.S. effort to stir up the troubled waters in Asia" (*China Daily* 2015). However, China noted the U.S.' failure in persuading ASEAN to uphold its moratorium proposal and more importantly, the tough task the U.S. faced in persuading these smaller Asian nations to risk antagonising China (Wroughton and Mooney 2014). A *Global Times* editorial comments that "[w]hile ASEAN may be happy for the U.S. to use the issues in the South China Sea to 'return to

Asia Pacific' [...], the ASEAN will not attempt to gain the U.S.' attention by jeopardising its ties with China" (Huanqiu 2015). According to the Chinese point of view, "ASEAN will 'strike a balance' between China and the U.S.", because this is where ASEAN's economic and geopolitical interests lie (Huanqiu 2015). Regarding the U.S.' efforts to inflict reputation costs on China's side, China appeared to be prepared to absorb the costs. In an interview during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference in Kuala Lumpur on 6 August 2015, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confidently declared that after China stopped dredging, Sino-U.S. relations would be stabilized (You 2017, 9 (footnote 35)).

The U.S. has to live with a new status quo in the Spratlys and greater presence of China in the South China Sea since the completion of China's land reclamation and construction work. The U.S. forces, however, have not been deterred from patrolling and conducting operations near the sea waters of these artificial islands. The U.S., nevertheless, still has geopolitical stakes in maintaining unhindered access to the waters of the region to project military power, thereby maintaining the U.S.-led order at sea (Fravel 2014, 2; T. T. Tran 2013, 4). Under the Trump administration, the U.S. Navy FONOPs conducted in the South China Sea at an increasing rate are in response to China's militarisation of artificial built islands (*Naval Today* 2018; Panda 2018b). In May and August 2017 and March 2018, the U.S. Navy destroyers USS *Dewey*, USS *John S. McCain* and USS *Mustin* respectively conducted FONOPs in the South China Sea by sailing within 12 nautical miles of Chinese-controlled Mischief Reef (Panda 2017a; 2018a; Ali and Blanchard 2018; JP MOD 2018). In September 2018, U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Decatur* challenged China's territorial claims when coming within 12 miles of Gaven and Johnson reefs (*Naval Today* 2018). Another FONOP was conducted in February 2019, when the USS *Spruance* and the USS *Preble* sailed near Mischief Reef in the Spratlys (Ng 2019a).⁵⁶ In contrast to the Obama administration, which had a policy of publicising FONOPs, the Trump administration reverted to the past practice of logging all FONOPs in the Navy's annual report, and not all operations have been publicly reported (ICAS 2017; Panda 2017a; 2017b; 2018b).

9.5. Analytical summary

China began reclamation operations in the Spratlys in late 2013. In a matter of months, with the support of the giant *Tianjing* and a fleet of dredgers, China completed expansion, transformed seven contested features into man-made islands and enabled them to host military facilities. From being the only major claimants without a runway in the Spratlys, China now possesses three airstrips in Subi, Mischief and Fiery Cross Reefs. While Chinese leaders might have been concerned about other claimants' construction work in the Spratlys being perceived as weakening China's position in the maritime disputes, the execution of such a massive and unprecedented island-building and construction projects in the South China Sea was mainly driven by the

⁵⁶ The FONOP operations in the South China Sea took place not only in the waters of the Spratly Islands; the U.S. Navy also conducted FONOPs near islands occupied by China in the Paracel Islands to protest China's prior notification requirements for innocent passage transits within 12 nautical miles of features and Beijing's straight baselines around the island group. Under the Trump administration, some of the publicly-known operations were carried out in July 2017 (within 12nm of the Triton island), October 2017 (near Paracel), January 2018 (within 12nm of Scarborough Shoal), and May 2018 (near Tree, Lincoln, Triton and Woody Islands), November 2018 (near the Paracels), and January 2019 (within 12nm of islands in the Paracels). See more: (Panda 2017b; 2018b; 2019; JP MOD 2018)

outposts' increasing value to Beijing's strategy of building a maritime power as well as by advanced technologies and growing capabilities in dredging. China's maritime coercive diplomacy was exercised in the form of presenting the U.S. and other claimants with a fait accompli of seven fortified outposts in the Spratlys. Through strengthening physical control of maritime features and enhancing its presence in the Spratly Islands, China's objectives were to create a new status quo in its favour without escalating a military retaliation, to compel other contestants to accept China's claims and, ultimately, to compel the region to accept the regional order emerging from the realisation of those claims in the South China Sea.

China succeeded in making permanent changes to features in the Spratlys and made gains with this fait accompli without triggering a military confrontation. Although other claimants have not accepted China's claims and the U.S. has continued to conduct FONOPs in the South China Sea, Beijing's coercive diplomacy effectively compelled other claimants and the U.S. to accept this new status quo established permanently in the Spratly Islands.

This outcome resulted from the fact that the balance of power and motivation was on China's side. According to George and Simons, the coercive diplomacy strategy is more likely to be successful if the side employing it is more highly motivated than its opponent by what is at stake. For other claimants' part, the massive military imbalance between Vietnam, the Philippines and China ruled out the possibility of confronting China militarily to interfere with or reverse the status quo in the Spratlys. At the same time, Vietnam and other ASEAN members refrained from adopting a confrontational approach towards China. After the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, it was the priority of Hanoi to re-establish cooperative relations with China. On the contrary, regarding China, its superiority in military capabilities, advanced technology and political support made it more willing to exercise the island-building projects in an unprecedented space and size.

The asymmetry of motivation is not just correctly applied between China and other small claimants. In respect to the U.S., China also believes that Washington suffered an asymmetry of interests vis-à-vis with China in the South China Sea, given the fact that while the South China Sea is more of a core interest to China than it is to the U.S. Furthermore, China was not deterred from undertaking these activities due to the delay and then the late conduct of U.S. operations in the Spratlys, which operations were initially designed to assert the legitimacy of legal claims upheld by the U.S. as well as to challenge China's claims.

Also, in China's cost-benefit analysis, the real benefits of its coercive diplomacy substantially outweigh the costs (Y. Sun 2016, 76). Reputational costs are believed by China to be manageable and China was prepared to absorb such costs. Measured statements were issued to confront criticism. Notably, Beijing offered positive economic initiatives to create the asymmetry of motivation in its favour, mollify the region's concerns and dial down the strong rhetoric against China in the South China Sea. As Yun Sun (2016, 76) from the Stimson Center explains, "[a]fter all, China has other ways – mainly economic – to improve ties with Southeast Asia while its claims in the South China Sea can hardly be achieved through any other method other than coercion".

Chapter 10

Comparative analysis

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the cases presented in the preceding five chapters. The chapter first discusses overarching conditions for China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy since 2011. It then highlights important characteristics of China's maritime coercive diplomacy and China's coercive objectives in the South China Sea. The third main section analyses the multiple tools and the way in which these tools have been employed in China's coercive strategy. It is followed by an assessment of outcomes and factors that influence the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. A general analysis of China's dispute management, U.S. strategy and the policies of other Southeast Asian contestants in the South China Sea is presented in the next section. The chapter concludes with some remarks on the future use of coercive diplomacy by rising powers.

10.1. Overarching conditions for China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy

Previous chapters have demonstrated that since 2011, the shift in the regional balance of power and China's rising maritime law enforcement and naval capabilities have created favourable conditions for coercive strategies. In the wake of the world's 2007–2008 financial crisis, Chinese policymakers re-assessed the nation's relative power and perceived a faster shift than anticipated in the regional balance of power in China's favour (F. Zhang 2018, 196; Scobell and Harold 2013, 112). As the U.S. had entered a period of decline, China's economy still enjoyed high-speed growth. China surpassed Japan, becoming the world's second-largest economy in 2010. The sheer power of its increased military and economic capabilities emboldened the Chinese ruling elite, inducing a behavioural shift (Luttwak 2012, 8; Matsuda 2014, 10–11).

All cases examined depicted evidence of the presence of the growing economic and military capabilities as well as advanced technology, including official documents and statements that served as guides for new tasks associated with newfound power and the confidence of Beijing in seizing these opportunities. The expansion of maritime law enforcement forces and a fleet of new ships equipped with a vast range of functions and capabilities enabled China to increase maritime patrols and enhance its physical presence in waters surrounding Second Thomas Shoal in 2013 and interfere with Philippine supply route in 2014. This newfound power also gave China confidence in its ability to engage in risky coercive behaviours, such as rapidly responding to and intervening in the arrests of Chinese fishing personnel in the case of Scarborough Shoal in 2012, and actively obstructing the operations of other claimants' vessels in China's claimed waters, such as harassing and cutting the seismic cables of Vietnam's survey vessels in 2011. Likewise, the cases of China's deployment of the HYSY 981 oil rig to Vietnam's EEZ in 2014 and its land reclamation at seven outposts in the Spratlys from 2013 suggest that China undertook these coercive actions because it could. It had the necessary resources and technology. The growth of maritime capabilities, including the offshore rig technology exemplified by the ultra-deepwater giant drilling rig HYSY 981, made China more capable than ever to conduct oil exploration and exploitation in deep sea areas claimed by China but contested by other countries. The advanced technology of the largest dredging vessel, the *Tianjing*, and the fleet of dozens of dredgers, large

construction-related vessels, developed for years made it possible for China to execute massive island-building projects at an unprecedented scale in the reefs – a thousand kilometres from China's shoreline. Furthermore, these coercive actions performed by maritime agencies have been supported by PLAN forces, which have received increasing budgets and have gone through two decades of modernisation. The expansion of its navy with advanced warfare ships and their presence behind civilian vessels has enabled conditions for risky coercive actions.

The increase in material capabilities, particularly its maritime law enforcement forces, has created favourable overarching conditions for China's increasing use of maritime coercive diplomacy strategies to manage its disputes with other Southeast Asian claimants in the South China Sea since 2011.

10.2. The nature and objectives of China's maritime coercive diplomacy

With the support of increased material capabilities, particularly maritime law enforcement capability, China used maritime coercive diplomacy to achieve various territorial and political goals in the South China Sea.

In the 2011 cutting-cables incidents and Second Thomas Shoal tensions in 2013–2014, China's maritime coercive diplomacy was in part reaction to other claimants' activities. Specifically, China reacted to Vietnam's oil exploration activities and the Philippines' planned construction. In these cases, China's maritime coercive diplomacy aimed to hinder the deterioration of its already-weak claims. China's efforts to establish a regular presence in 2013 and exert pressure on the Philippines' presence at Second Thomas Shoal, interfering with Manila's routine re-supply missions in 2014, were a response to Manila's plan to repair the *BRP Sierra Madre*. The blockade, therefore, was carried out to pre-empt Manila's attempt to fortify its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal. In the case of cutting Vietnamese oil survey vessels' seismic cables in 2011, before the incidents, Hanoi conducted a number of exploration activities in locations within its EEZ but also within China's nine-dash line. These activities appeared to challenge China's prospect of access to natural resources. Cutting seismic cables was meant to deter Vietnam from conducting oil exploration activities, thereby stopping the deterioration of its position vis-à-vis Vietnam in the South China Sea disputes. By deterring its neighbours from accessing natural resources in their own waters, China compelled Hanoi to engage in joint developments, legitimising China's assertions of historic rights and strengthening its claims in the South China Sea.

For the case of massive land reclamation in the Spratlys, the fact that Vietnam has advantage in the Spratly Islands in terms of the number of occupied-features and Hanoi had actively engaged in upgrading its outposts and reclaiming land since 2011 is probably perceived as weakening China's overall position. However, the exceptional speed and scale as well as subsequent militarisation activities indicate that the objective of China's execution of the island-building projects was not simply a catch-up. The factor of provocation by Vietnam was also completely absent in the case of China's deployment of the HYSY 981 in 2014. During the crisis, China only publicly demanded that Hanoi withdraw its maritime law enforcement ships and stop disrupting the operation of the HYSY 981. In the case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal crisis, the Philippines' decision to deploy its largest warship to investigate the Chinese fishing activities directly triggered the stand-off. However, Chinese coercion was not caused by China's perception of challenges from the Philippines to its claims or positions (Chubb 2016, 289).

The case of cable-cutting incidents is also the only case in which Beijing's maritime coercive diplomacy was directly related to the objective of guaranteeing prospects of access to the resources in the overlapping areas between Vietnam's EEZ and China's nine-dash line. The remaining four cases, even the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, prove that natural resources are not a primary objective of Chinese coercive actions. Maritime coercive diplomacy instead was used to serve other more important political objectives.

Specific goals pursued by China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea are summarised in Table 2. First of all, relating to maritime territorial disputes, China's maritime coercive diplomacy has been attempted to compel other claimants to accept China's nine-dash line claim, China's jurisdiction over the waters it claims and China's sovereignty over land features in the South China Sea, both in the Paracels and Spratlys. Second, with regards to bilateral relations between China and other contestants, China's use of coercive diplomacy compels other claimants to adopt a non-confrontational policy towards China. For instance, in cases of coercion against the Philippines in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off and Second Thomas Shoal blockades, China also aimed to compel the Philippines to cease its efforts to internationalise the disputes, particularly through using international arbitration to settle the dispute. Third, in regard to China's geopolitical interests in the region, the PRC Foreign Ministry indirectly and implicitly, albeit repeatedly, expressed opposition to any involvement of the U.S. China also implicitly warned other claimants against any policy to pursue a closer relationship with the U.S., particularly Vietnam, to balance against China. Zhang succinctly summarises China's objectives as "[d]eterring Southeast Asian claimant states as well as the U.S. from damaging Chinese interests and compelling them to respect those interests has become a central task of Chinese policy" (F. Zhang 2018, 197–98). China's massive island-building projects in the South China Sea since December 2013 may be best understood as laying the necessary groundwork for successful operations of these strategies in the future (F. Zhang 2018, 198).

Table 2: China's overarching goals and coercive objectives in the South China Sea

	China's overarching goals	
South China Sea maritime territorial disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assert China's maritime claims - Persuade and pressure other claimants to accept joint development - Oppose the internationalisation of disputes: 1) the involvement of any other country/outside powers, i.e. the U.S. (indirectly stated); 2) efforts to seek international mediation - Encourage bilateral negotiations 	
Cases	China's specific coercive objectives	Outcome
Seismic cable-cutting incidents 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coerce Vietnam to stop oil exploration activities in areas claimed by China - Compel Vietnam to accept joint development - Deter Vietnam from taking actions against China's strategic interests by partnering with the U.S. (implicit objective) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failed - Failed - Achieved
Scarborough Shoal stand-off 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stop the Philippines from arresting Chinese fishermen - Compel the Philippines to withdraw its vessels from the Shoal - Deter the Philippines from intervening in the future activities of Chinese fishing or Coast Guard vessels - Compel the Philippines leadership to change its perceived confrontational policy against China, i.e. drop the arbitration bid and return to 'friendly' diplomatic consultations and bilateral negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieved - Achieved - Achieved - Failed
Coercion at Second Thomas Shoal 2013–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand the Philippines withdraw from its outposts and abandon the <i>BRP Sierra Madre</i> - Deter the Philippines from undertaking further construction at the Shoal - Compel the Philippines to return to negotiations and stop its attempts to pursue arbitration against China 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failed - Failed - Failed
HYSY 981 oil rig crisis 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coerce Vietnam to stop interfering the HYSY 981's operation and withdraw its ships and personnel from the site - Compel Vietnam to accept China's sovereignty claims over the Paracels - Compel Vietnam to accept China's sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the waters it claims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failed - Failed - Failed
Spratly Islands land reclamation (2013–2015) and militarisation in the South China Sea (2016–present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen presence and control over the Spratlys and create a new permanent status quo without escalating a military retaliation from other claimants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieved

10.3. Tools and components of China's maritime coercive diplomacy

To achieve its territorial and political objectives in the disputes in the South China Sea, the PRC has employed multiple sea-based forces. Coercive actions were undertaken by a mixture of naval, paramilitary and other vessels from multiple agencies as well as fishing vessels (E. Goh 2013, 109). On the front line, China relied on its high-powered paramilitary forces, which directly engaged in confrontation and stand-offs and was involved in coercive actions. A major stand-off at Scarborough Shoal, the oil rig crisis and the "near-occupation" operation of Second Thomas Shoal indicated a pattern in China's use of paramilitary forces, in which China dispatched to the scene a great deal of CMS, FLEC, and later Coast Guard ships to create an intimidating presence and overwhelm the law enforcement capacity of China's opponents. They were major actors responsible for handling crises, relying on threats and exercising the ramming, bumping and firing of water cannons to deter other claimants' ships. Such a use of paramilitary forces and fishing vessels helped China to achieve two seemingly contradictory goals. On the one hand, China actively created or escalated situations to advance its maritime interests. On the other hand, since the use of paramilitary forces presents a non-military approach, China can successfully make gains without destabilising the region or triggering a military confrontation. In the Scarborough Shoal case, China used this approach to exploit the Philippines' misstep of sending a military ship to investigate civilian fishing vessels and successfully made gains while claiming that it did not resort to military forces. This particular use of paramilitary and civilian forces also pushed weaker claimants to either escalate the situation to armed conflict or allow China to create a new status quo in the disputed areas. In other cases, such as cable-cutting incidents, paramilitary forces were deployed to operate the so-called routine law enforcement patrols. Under such a pretext, CMS, FLEC and Coast Guard forces either directly engaged in disrupting Vietnam's economic activities, denying the Philippines' access to Second Thomas Shoal, or indirectly backed up their fishing vessels to undertake disruptive actions in the second cable-cutting incident.

While the Coast Guard played a major role in coercive activities, the PLAN was held in reserve. However, the deterrent effects of superior naval power have been employed in maritime coercion in numerous ways. Firstly, PLAN vessels' presence, per se, served as a 'deterrent reminder' that China could manage any escalatory action its opponent might be tempted to try, thereby discouraging escalation (Martinson 2018, 31; Dutton 2013, 4). Chinese naval forces were not far from the site of Scarborough Shoal during the stand-off. In the case of the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, while the naval forces still avoided direct confrontations with Vietnamese vessels, they directly and intentionally made their presence as conspicuous as possible. In the case of land reclamation, the PLAN even played a more important role in initiating and later carrying out the projects. Secondly, the Chinese military communicates Beijing's resolve and threats through military exercises held in the disputed waters. During tensions over the cable cuttings in 2011, China conducted its first joint armed exercise. To send a message to the Philippines in the midst of Scarborough Shoal stand-off, China organised military drills and a subsequent test of its newly-developed combat aircraft. These military-related moves serve as a display of China's power and capabilities and convey warning signals to force competing actors to back down during tensions, as well as to pre-empt foreign intervention. In other words, the military exercises were designed to help China accomplish political goals.

Besides sea-based forces, the PRC employed non-military and unconventional tools in its coercive diplomacy ranging from oil rigs and dredgers to positive and negative economic

inducements, political isolation and media and propaganda campaigns. As we can see in the case of oil rig deployment, the gigantic oil rig and a number of smaller oil rigs deployed to the undelimited waters in the South China Sea were used as the main instrument of maritime coercion to enforce China's maritime claims and increase pressure on Vietnam. In the land reclamation project, the strategic instruments employed by China were the advanced dredging vessel – the *Tianjing* – along with a fleet of dredgers and construction-related ships.

The Chinese leverage economic power to exert pressure on its opponents to alter their behaviour. During the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, we can see China's adoption of an informal embargo on Philippine bananas as instrument of coercion. In the midst of the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, China effectively suspended credit lines to a number of projects in Vietnam. Furthermore, travel warnings issued by the PRC Foreign Ministry and bans on tourism imposed a heavy economic cost on the tourism industry of both the Philippines and Vietnam during the Scarborough Shoal stand-off and the oil rig crisis. However, China did not resort to negative economic inducements during the cable-cutting incidents. Nor did it adopt these types of informal economic sanctions towards the Philippines again during tensions over the Second Thomas Shoal. Beijing leveraged its superior economic leverage not only through punitive trade policies, but also inducements under the forms of economic initiatives, loans, and investments. We can see the launch of AIIB and China Silk Road Fund during the acceleration phase of its land reclamation projects in the Spratly Islands.

With regard to political and diplomatic tools, the examined cases demonstrated that while Chinese official statements expressed firmness, it also sought to frame China as reactive to threats to its national sovereignty and interests or to provocations by other claimants. Chinese diplomats also engaged in putting pressure on rival claimants. Chinese officials issued stern warnings about the disputes with the Philippines over Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, and engaged in a war of words with Vietnam during the cable-cutting incidents. However, China's diplomatic strategy in the case of its land reclamation 2013–2015 was different. Chinese officials largely remained silent and used carefully measured language during its execution of massive land reclamation projects in the Spratlys; they even put forward diplomatic initiatives to reassure regional nations.

Additionally, dividing ASEAN and isolating its rivals to limit their internationalisation efforts have also formed a part of China's coercive diplomacy towards the Philippines and Vietnam during the tensions. In the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, China influenced Cambodia, the chair of ASEAN at the time, while reassuring other ASEAN member states and blaming the Philippines for instigating the crisis. In the case of the HYSY 981 oil rig deployment, to influence international public opinion and isolate Vietnam, China launched a propaganda campaign by sending formal position papers on its claims over the Paracels to the UN Secretary General and all member states. At the same time, China suspended bilateral exchange plans and refused all Vietnamese proposals to open up communications to address the crisis.

To exert public and psychological pressure on its rivals, China took advantage of media in at least three distinct ways. Firstly, it launched propaganda campaigns to justify its maritime claims by publishing a series of statements and documents on legal and historical basis. In the cases of Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, this type of campaign particularly aimed to preempt the Philippines' attempt to bring the dispute to international arbitration and then undermine

the case. Secondly, through CCP mouthpieces, such as CCTV, *People's Daily*, *Xinhua* and other official websites, the PRC publicised news on its capacity, the development of new technology and military exercises to create psychological pressure on its adversaries. In the middle of the tensions caused by the cutting of seismic cables of Vietnam's oil survey ships, CCTV reported on the first joint armed exercises, while the expansion plan of law enforcement forces was unveiled through other CCP mouthpieces. Thirdly, during crises and tensions, Chinese authorities allowed the media to publish threatening commentaries and editorials. During the cable-cutting incidents, the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, and the blockage in Second Thomas Shoal, Beijing issued vague threats to Hanoi and Manila through media mouthpieces. However, as the case of HYSY 981 oil rig illustrated, China carefully played this card in a way in which it did not stir up nationalist fervour up to the point of limiting China's room to manoeuvre.

Furthermore, coercive diplomacy by China was also carried out in cyberspace, when China either allowed or did not condemn hacking activities. The official websites of governmental agencies, news agencies and universities in the Philippines and Vietnam were attacked during tensions over Scarborough Shoal and the cuttings of cables.

In sum, all cases indicate that China has become more prepared to intensify its application of coercive diplomacy using a growing array of resources and tools at its disposal in order to accomplish its territorial and political goals in maritime disputes in the South China Sea (Collin Koh 2015).

10.4. Outcomes and factors affecting the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy

China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy achieved partial and complete success in the cases of the Scarborough Shoal stand-off and land reclamation in the Spratlys. The HYSY 981 crisis and blockages in Second Thomas Shoal are two cases in which China failed to attain its coercive objectives. The result, however, was mixed in the cable-cutting incidents, when China failed to get Vietnam to comply with its publicly-stated demands but succeeded in achieving unstated political objectives (See Tables 2 and 3).

Table 3: Case comparison on factors affecting the outcome

Cases	<i>Asymmetry of power</i>	<i>Asymmetry of motivation</i>	<i>U.S. involvement / reaction</i>	<i>Domestic factors</i>	<i>Tactical factor(s): Clarity concerning the precise terms of compliance and settlement</i>
Seismic cable-cutting incidents, 2011	In China's favour	In Vietnam's favour in the dispute over jurisdiction and sovereign rights to natural resources In China's favour in the aspect of strategic interests	Increased involvement	Limited	-
Scarborough Shoal stand-off, 2012	In China's favour (Decisive role in fait accompli)	In China's favour	Ambiguous	Limited	-
Coercion at Second Thomas Shoal, 2013–2014	In China's favour	In the Philippines' favour	Direct involvement	-	-
HYSY 981 oil rig crisis, 2014	In China's favour	In Vietnam's favour	Strong reaction	Limited	Unclear
Spratlys land reclamation, 2013–2015 and militarisation in the South China Sea, 2016–present	In China's favour (Decisive role in fait accompli)	In China's favour	Slow response	-	-

10.4.1. The asymmetry of power

In the situation of China's coercion against small states, the asymmetry of power factor is constant. China is far more powerful than most other Southeast Asian nations. A great imbalance in the capabilities of the parties exists all the time and this disparity has even increased over time. The study shows that despite its overwhelming preponderance of power, China did not succeed in every case. Further, considering their limited capabilities, the Philippines and Vietnam still chose to resist and did not comply with China's demands, in the case of Second Thomas Shoal, and the HYSY 981 crisis.

China's strength advantage does not guarantee successful results for all of its coercive attempts. The success in coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea, however, is much dependent on China's superiority of material power in three ways. First, it is important to reiterate that China's *fait accompli* would not have succeeded without its superior naval power, the development of maritime law enforcement forces as well as advanced technologies. As mentioned above, with such forces and technologies, China was able to not only rapidly respond and flood the scene to outnumber the Philippines' vessels at sea but also execute the island-building project at an extraordinary pace and scope. Second, the asymmetrical power relationship between China and other claimants and coercion backed up by a clear superiority in material capabilities played a significant role in arousing the fear of military confrontation in the case of Scarborough Shoal stand-off and the unwillingness to retaliate against China's building of artificial islands to reverse the previously existing status quo in the Spratlys. In other words, it is this imbalance that creates a fear of 'unacceptable escalation' in the opponent's mind, thereby facilitating the success of coercive diplomacy strategy. Third, with its military power and reputation as the only claimant to ever resort to force in the South China Sea dispute, China established the credibility to its threat and successfully demonstrated its resolve to protect and assert its interests in the South China Sea. Vietnam took the initiative to de-escalate and continued its policy of cautiously approaching the U.S. to avoid disrupting its bilateral relationship with China after Beijing sent a warning signal to Hanoi through a show of force in June 2011. Due to limited space, this study has not covered China's coercive diplomacy towards Vietnam in 2017. It is, however, worth noting that in 2011 China cut seismic cables but failed to deter Hanoi from continuing its oil exploration activities in the Block 136-03. However, it successfully coerced Hanoi to suspend a natural gas-drilling expedition at that location in July 2017, reportedly with the threat of force to attack Vietnamese outposts in the Spratly Islands (Hayton 2017a; 2017b).

10.4.2. The strength and asymmetry of motivation

As the existing discussion in the literature and case studies have stressed, in the situation of coercive diplomacy used by a dominant or rising power, the relative motivation between the coercer and the coerced plays an important role in determining the outcome of coercive diplomacy in general and maritime coercive diplomacy in particular. The strategy is more likely to be successful if the asymmetry of motivation favours the side employing it. The existence of important intrinsic interests in the issue at stake for the small states, however, can strengthen their motivation and result in their resistance against a rising power's coercion.

Such asymmetry of motivation favouring the small states is best illustrated by the cases of the cutting-cables incidents, the Second Thomas Shoal and the HYSY 981 oil rig, where China's coercive diplomacy was ineffective. The exploitable oil and gas reserves on the continental shelves

of Vietnam would be a mere drop in the bucket given China's demand (Glaser and Poling 2018). Whether China can access natural resources in the South China Sea, particularly oil and gas, has not had any immediate effect on its economic development in the short and perhaps even medium term. For China's neighbours, by contrast, the inability to independently develop their energy resources comes at a significant cost (Glaser and Poling 2018). This intrinsic interest in the issue prohibited Vietnam from giving in to China and stopping its oil exploration activities in 2011. In the case of oil rig crisis, Vietnam's resistance to China's unilateral coercive move was motivated by the location: Vietnam strongly believed that no matter the resolution of demarcation to the areas, it lay on Vietnam's EEZ. Also, in this case, Beijing's choice of location and its justification based on its sovereignty claims over the Paracels touched upon both Vietnam's claims of sovereign rights within its claimed-EEZ and its sovereignty claim over the Paracel Islands. While Beijing weakened its advantage of having de facto control of the entire Paracels in this episode, it was unprepared for a vehement reaction from Vietnam. Similarly, China's attempted blockade in the Second Thomas Shoal failed. The proximity of the Shoal to Palawan confirms its importance to Philippines' national security and the presence of Filipino marines stationed on the *BRP Sierra Madre* has made the Philippines have more at stake (Martinson 2018, 40–41). Philippine leaders clearly were committed to maintaining their foothold at the Shoal (Martinson 2018, 41) by continuing to re-provision the marines by air and undertaking the repairs on the *BRP Sierra Madre*.

However, in the case of Scarborough Shoal, before the stand-off neither China nor the Philippines had had a permanent presence there. Along with the effect of the enormous imbalance of material capabilities, such a situation on the ground reduced the Philippines' motivation to confront China. Likewise, the asymmetry of motivation was in China's favour in terms of its strategic interests in the region. During the tensions over the cable-cutting incidents, Vietnam resisted to China's demands related to natural resources. Hanoi, however, took the initiative to de-escalate the tension and maintain a stable bilateral relationship with China by cautiously avoiding any further steps to a closer relationship with the U.S. In this respect, Hanoi's interests during this episode were limited only to protecting its interests and rights within the areas it believed it was entitled to under international law; it had no interest in disrupting its relationship with China. China, by contrast, had a strategic interest in deterring its neighbours from getting the outside power involved in the disputes and partnering with the U.S. to balance against China. For the case of land reclamation and militarisation, China felt a stronger impetus to execute the island-building projects when seven land features proved to offer increasing strategic value to the new maritime strategy in general and to its strategic goal of 'building China into a strong maritime power' adopted by the CCP shortly before 2013. Apart from the intrinsic interests, as George and Simons posit, what is critical in this respect is that the strategy is more likely to be successful if the side employing it believes it is more highly motivated to achieve its objective (George and Simons 1994a, 281). When it comes to the South China Sea, China believes that it has asymmetric advantages over the U.S. in terms of its geography, history, and interests (McDevitt 2014, 68). The imbalance of resolve which China believed to be on its side in the South China Sea increased its confidence and willingness to accelerate the island-building project.

In addition to the asymmetry of motivation fixed by the nature of the conflict, the case of land reclamation is the only case in which China created an asymmetry of motivation in its favours by offering a carrot that reduced the target's motivation to resist. China resorted to economic initiatives and offered inducements during the phase of acceleration of island-building and its

aftermath. Despite other claimants' protestations at China's construction in and militarisation of the South China Sea, they took part in China's economic initiatives, joining China-backed AIIB and demonstrating the effectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy (Davison 2018).

10.4.3. The reaction of the external power

All cases lend support to the argument that the nature of support for the weaker states from the external power, here the U.S., is one of the key factors in determining the effectiveness of the coercive diplomacy strategy. The U.S. may affirm its support of small state(s), thus emboldening resistance and undermining an effort towards coercive diplomacy. Furthermore, an external power like the U.S. might also get involved directly by sending deterrent signals and taking counter-coercion measure, thereby influencing the coercing power to back down. Without such availability of support, small states are more likely to give in when facing coercion by a big power and coercive diplomacy might be more effective.

As shown in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, Chinese official statements interpreted the U.S.' restraint from clarifying the Mutual Defence Treaty with the Philippines and its repetition of 'not taking sides' as signals of the lack of a U.S. commitment to the Philippines in the ongoing crisis. As we found in state-connected strategic writings and policy assessments, China demonstrated increasing confidence that the U.S. would not intervene in the dispute in order to avoid damaging its relations with China. More importantly, China, in this case, approached the U.S. to put pressure on the Philippines to cease the stand-off. Manila's decision to withdraw the vessels from Shoal was more a result of pressure from Washington than Beijing. In the case of China's land reclamation activities from 2013 to 2015, the U.S. was more vocal in criticising China for undertaking these actions. However, it was not until China reached the final phases of building seven artificial islands that the U.S. Navy resumed its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. The U.S.' failure to gain support for its 'voluntary freeze' proposal in the regional forum and its slowness in reacting to Chinese moves in the South China Sea gave the Chinese opportunities to move forward with construction activities to reduce uncertainty and risks. In the context of the weakness of U.S. deterrence, the counter-measures from Hanoi, Manila and ASEAN, which were largely diplomatic with the main purpose of internationalising the disputes, hardly exerted any pressure on Beijing.

In contrast, the U.S.'s direct involvement and strong signals of deterrence during the Second Thomas Shoal tensions, where China applied a much more restrained strategy. The U.S. appeared to take a more proactive approach to support its ally. By conducting reconnaissance flights over the Shoal during the tensions, the U.S. signalled its opposition to the attempted blockade and acted to intimidate the Coast Guard forces implementing it (Martinson 2018, 41). The analysis of Chinese statements shows Beijing's deep concerns over the expansion of the U.S. involvement and consideration for a more cautious strategy. At the same time, with the direct assistance from its ally, the Philippines took the risk to continue its efforts to re-supply its troops and maintain control over the Shoal.

Furthermore, the nature of the relationship between the target of the coercion strategy and an external power – the U.S. – impacted the small states' behaviour and policy towards China and the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. With the backing from the U.S., Manila was emboldened and determined to bring the case to international arbitration despite pressure from

Beijing. That explains why although Beijing successfully took de facto control of Scarborough Shoal, it failed to compel Manila to abandon its policy and undo its legal challenge against China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. While the Philippines is a formal treaty ally of the U.S., Vietnam has no comprehensive defence agreement with the U.S. and is only the U.S.'s partner. Thus, Hanoi did not engage in a direct legal challenge to Beijing (Bradsher 2014). Nor did Hanoi provoke China by aligning with the U.S. to challenge what China considers its 'strategic interests' and influence in the region. However, as small states, both the Philippines and Vietnam have made efforts to counter China's coercive diplomacy by engaging the U.S. in the region. The Philippines under the Aquino administration adopted a balancing policy against China's maritime expansion when reinforcing its alliance with the U.S. by signing the EDCA (De Castro 2016a, 141–44), which Manila believed had a deterrent effect on China's harassment of the Philippines' resupply missions to the Second Thomas Shoal. Avoiding a clear-cut balancing against or joining of either the Chinese or U.S. bandwagon (Thiele 2017, 265), Hanoi, however, announced a joint naval exchange with the U.S. and discussed the elevation of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership during the cable-cutting incidents. During the oil rig crisis, Hanoi took important moves indicating a shift in its approach to China through possibly seeking to resort to legal action and edge closer to the U.S. Beijing's decision to withdraw the rig one month ahead of schedule and end the crisis resulted from the calculation of risk from such a shift in Vietnam's policy and the more direct involvement of the U.S.

10.4.4. Domestic factors

This study shows that domestic factors including institutional factors and public opinion did not play an important role in constraining or enhancing the effectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. The ability to mobilise large resources ranging from vessels to dredgers in a short period of time, as well as the ability to maintain such operations over a long duration of time confirmed that China's coercion in maritime disputes was not only directed by the central government but also materialised through the coordination among agencies rather than its absence. There is also no evidence that the competition among agencies resulted in the adoption of a more coercive approach adopted during the crises in the South China Sea. Local activism, if existing at all, did not affect the outcome of the coercive diplomacy strategy.

With regard to public opinion, the issue in authoritarian China is not whether China had or did not have public support for its coercive diplomacy to successfully coerce the target; it is when and the extent to which Chinese leaders used public opinion to create pressure on other contenders in the South China Sea to coerce them to change their behaviour and policy. Nevertheless, public opinion is not a political card that the Chinese government uses arbitrarily. China allowed vehement reaction and articles to put pressure on the Philippines in the cases of Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal. Vague threats were delivered to Vietnam during the tensions of the cable-cutting incidents. However, it controlled the media during the HYSY 981 crisis and issued measured messages in the case of land reclamation in the Spratlys. The effect of public opinion on the effectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy is limited. The successful case of China's coercion in the Philippines' decision to withdraw its vessels from the Scarborough Shoal was made out of the fear of unacceptable escalation and, later, pressure from the U.S., rather than pressure from the Chinese resolve demonstrated in nationalist commentaries. In the case of coercion against Vietnam, to some degree, nationalist and threatening editorials proved to be counter-productive, as it created the resistance and anti-China sentiments among Vietnamese citizens.

In the target states, domestic factors such as public opinion were present in the case of Scarborough Shoal and the HYSY 981 crisis. For instance, after China applied informal punitive economic sanctions on the Philippines' fruit exports to China, the business community and exporters blamed the government for mishandling the Scarborough Shoal issue as a sovereignty issue instead of a simple poaching problem. They then placed pressure on the government to resolve the disputes and come to an agreement with China. On the contrary, during the case of the HYSY 981 crisis, the Vietnamese government was under pressure to take a stronger stand against China under the context of anti-Chinese protests escalating into violence, widespread concerns and pressing calls for the government to address economic reliance on China and take legal actions. However, in much the same situation in China, Vietnam is an authoritarian state. Public opinion is a tool applied to signal its resolve and mobilised to express its displeasure with China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea. During the cable-cutting incidents and the oil rig crisis, the Vietnamese government allowed such demonstrations, but Hanoi's resistance to China's coercive diplomacy did not result from public opinion. In mid-May 2014, when protests in Vietnam developed into deadly riots, Hanoi decided to swiftly curtail nationalist demonstrations. Even as the HYSY 981 stand-off continued for another two months up until mid-July 2014, no additional anti-China protests occurred in Vietnam. This lends support to the argument that the political – and economic – risks caused by escalating protests outweigh the potential benefits of diplomatic leverage, which motivated Vietnamese leaders to quell protests (P. Hoang 2019, 15–16, 18–19). Thus, public opinion played a limited role in Vietnam's counter-coercion strategy and its policy towards China. In sum, the resistance against China's coercion and the decision to de-escalate made by the Philippines and Vietnam, to a large extent, resulted from other factors rather than pressure from public opinion.

10.4.5. The clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement

The only tactical factor that has a notable effect on the effectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy is the lack of clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement of the crisis. The factor is present only in the case of the HYSY 981 crisis. China repeatedly demanded that Vietnam withdraw its vessels and stop disrupting the operation of the oil rig. But China's underlying objective behind the move was unclear to Vietnamese leaders. During this episode, there were no clear specific terms regarding the termination of the crisis, as China refused all proposals for communications proposals. The unclear signalling of its objectives and the ambiguity in the terms of settlement of the crisis, regardless of whether they were deliberate to maintain manoeuvring room for its actions or whether they resulted from China's unpreparedness for Vietnam's vehement reaction, caused Hanoi to resist due to two main reasons.

First, without any pretext and no signalling, Vietnam felt 'betrayed' by China and perceived China's hard-line approach as a policy shift to manage disputes as well as its policy towards Vietnam. Such a perception caused Hanoi to feel less restraint in keeping a low profile in the situation and it chose to seek international support for its efforts to challenge China's behaviour. Second, Hanoi had no clue what the payoff would be if it backed down. If Hanoi gave up in exchange for a stable relationship with China, which is always considered a priority of its foreign policy, then it was not guaranteed. Prior to the HYSY 981 crisis, the relationship between China and Vietnam had already been relatively good and China disrupted that relationship in the first place by unilaterally placing the HYSY 981 in that location for the first time ever. The consequences of giving in, however, would be more substantial. It could cost the VCP the

legitimacy of its sovereignty claims over the Paracels, sovereign right claims over its EEZ, continental shelf, economic interests if oil was found in the area and even the legitimacy of its own regime in the eyes of Vietnamese citizens.

Therefore, the lack of clarity concerning the precise terms of compliance and settlement of the stand-off, to an important degree, led to China's failure to coerce Vietnam and caused the resistance from Vietnam's side instead.

10.5. General analysis on China's dispute management, U.S. strategy and other claimants' policies in the South China Sea

The analysis of attempts of maritime coercive diplomacy employed by China since 2011 highlights several important characteristics and factors affecting China's coercion. First, all cases and incidents are small and separate steps in China's greater strategy of incrementalism, also known as what Thomas Schelling identified in 1966 as 'salami-slicing'. China seeks to alter the status quo gradually. Each of its calculated coercive steps is subtle and makes small gains, but the cumulative results are significant and cause profound changes to the status quo (Brands and Cooper 2018, 13,15).

Second, in both successful cases, China's coercive diplomacy was employed effectively in the form of a *fait accompli* to make territorial gains. *Fait accompli* is a special form of coercion: to some extent, the coercing power seems to impose a new status quo on its rival. On the other hand, the only choice left to the rival is waging a military confrontation to reverse the status quo or accepting it. In the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, Chinese vessels completed the first phase of a *fait accompli* in establishing their presence at the Shoal and forcing the Philippines naval ship to back down, and they completed the *fait accompli* of taking *de facto* control of the Shoal from the Philippines when all vessels from the Philippines' side were withdrawn. China has also effectively deterred Manila from sending its vessels back to the disputed Shoal after the stand-off, thereby successfully getting the Philippines to accept China's permanent presence. In the case of land reclamation in the Spratly islands, creating seven artificial islands in a matter of months and presenting the whole region with a *fait accompli* – these actions themselves – effectively compelled other states, including the U.S., to accept a new status quo with permanent changes in the features of the Spratlys, which cannot be overturned without escalating militarily.

Despite reputational costs, China overall made substantial and practical gains through its *fait accompli* in the South China Sea. As Martinson points out, *faits accomplis* have shown to be a winning approach to dispute management (Martinson 2018, 38).

Third, China carefully calibrated multiple small coercive actions to enforce maritime claims while not provoking the U.S. or other claimants into open conflict and avoiding triggering an armed conflict (Brands and Cooper 2018, 15; Corr 2018, 24). All cases show that China's coercive actions were carefully calculated to achieve political goals. Beijing watched closely the reaction of the U.S. and that of other claimants to design and then re-adjust its actions. Before undertaking any move, China always anticipated the responses and gauged the potential risks. Also, Chinese behaviours became more coercive only when China believed further moves would encounter no serious resistance. However, these cases demonstrated a variety of ways in which

China flexibly re-adjusted its coercive behaviours before and after the signals and responses. As shown in the land reclamation case, in fact, China had anticipated a stronger reaction from the U.S. and might have re-adjusted its land reclamation activities. But when it noticed that the U.S. proved to be too cautious and slow in responding to its initial construction activities, China made decisive moves in changing permanently the status quo in the South China Sea. A similar pattern is seen in China's de facto control of Scarborough Shoal after reading a weak signal from the U.S. as non-intervention. On the contrary, when the U.S. signalled its strong reaction, China cautiously re-adjusted its action by reducing its degree of assertiveness, for instance, in the case of China's pressure on the Philippine presence at the Second Thomas Shoal. Also, the analysis of the HYSY 981 case indicated that the Chinese decision to deploy the HYSY 981 to Vietnam's EEZ was carefully made on the premise of its calculation of U.S. involvement as well as Vietnam's reaction. What made China decide to reverse its action earlier than planned was the unexpectedly strong reaction from the Vietnamese side, which signalled its commitment by the possibility of moving forward a legal action against China and seeking a closer relationship with the U.S.

Lastly, in only one case of land reclamation did China use inducement to create an asymmetry in its favour. But it also appears to be an element of China's long-term regional strategy. As Feng Zhang notes, Chinese policymakers assessed that in principle, no country in Southeast Asia desires a bad relationship with China; thus, all countries are amenable to rewards and inducements. Combining coercion with inducement, the Chinese believe that no regional backlash will be unmanageable while China can make and consolidate gains in the South China Sea (F. Zhang 2018, 198–99).

With regard to the U.S.' South China Sea policy and its regional strategy, there are four features. First, as Taylor Fravel points out, the U.S. has increased its attention and level of involvement following the increase in tensions between China and other Southeast Asian claimants in the South China Sea disputes (Fravel 2014, 1). The content of its declaratory policy towards the South China Sea issue has been altered and expanded in response to changes in the level of tensions in the disputes (Fravel 2014, 1). In July 2010, at ARF held in Hanoi, while reiterating the U.S.' 'national interest in freedom of navigation', opposition to 'the use or threat of force by any claimant' and 'not taking sides', Secretary of State Hillary Clinton introduced new elements of U.S. policy, including 'resolving disputes without coercion', support for a 'collaborative diplomatic process by all claimants' and the position on the principle that the land dominates the sea (Fravel 2014, 5). After the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the U.S. issued a statement that identified China explicitly and reiterated the U.S. interest in peace and stability. The U.S. position grew more firm in 2014 after a series of China's coercion efforts ranging from its pressures on the Philippines in Second Thomas Shoal to the updating of fishing regulations in Hainan province. The U.S. issued its most detailed statement of policy towards the South China Sea to date and affirmed U.S. support for the Philippine decision to pursue arbitration and described it as an example of solving disputes in a peaceful, non-coercive way (Fravel 2014, 6–7).

Second, U.S. policy in the South China Sea has sought to shape China's behaviour in the region by highlighting the costs of coercion. Costs for Beijing included reputational costs and an improved position of the U.S. in the region (Fravel 2014, 2). The U.S. has strengthened its alliances and partnerships in the South China Sea region. The U.S. has announced a Comprehensive Partnership with Vietnam in 2013 and Malaysia in 2014. In 2014, the U.S. signed the EDCA with

the Philippines and partially lifted its arms embargo on Vietnam. In 2016, President Obama announced the lifting of this embargo.⁵⁷

Third, however, there is a tension between greater involvement to manage tensions and U.S. interest in limiting the role of the South China Sea issue in the U.S.-China relationship. The U.S. has sought to reassure its allies and partners and deter China's coercion; it has also tried not to let its greater involvement upset China and maintained neutrality over questions of sovereignty (Fravel 2014, 1–2). Such a tension prevented the U.S. from sending a deterrent signal credible enough to deter the Chinese. The U.S. failed to respond with sufficient force to China's actions and claims to maintain a peaceful equilibrium to stop further transgressions (Corr 2018, 19). The U.S. failed to effectively deter Chinese advances, especially the 2012 seizure of Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines and the construction of massive air and naval bases in the Spratly Islands. The U.S. is not going to become involved in any attempt to expel the Chinese or to reverse the status quo (McDevitt 2014, 7). U.S. reluctance and later failures caused China not only to assume that the U.S. would not risk a conflict with China over features in the South China Sea but also to believe that the U.S. declaration of the South China Sea as in its U.S. national interest is a bluff (F. Zhang 2018, 199). After all, it instigated a perception of asymmetry of motivation in China's favour.

Fourth, there is a gap between the interests the U.S. claims and those of its allies and partners. In action, the U.S. is focused on freedom of navigation. This focus does not meet the expectation and priorities of its Asian allies and partners, which are to defend their territories and resources from China. There were no specifics on support to its Asian allies and partners in their near-daily military encounters with China (Corr 2018, 23). However, while some argue that a stronger response from the U.S. may provoke China and increase tension in the South China Sea, it is, nevertheless, hard to imagine that the absence of a U.S. strategy would have induced China to claim less in the dispute (T. Kim 2018, 185).

In respect to small states' policies in the South China Sea disputes, these countries also carefully balance between firmness in standing up against Chinese coercion and self-restraint not to overprovoke China. Southeast Asian states' military capabilities are overwhelmed by China's, and they are by no means in a position to confront it. If they are more ready to concede to China, the status quo might have been more dramatically revised in favour of China (T. Kim 2018, 185). But reading the wrong signals from the U.S. and applying a hard and confrontational approach towards China only gave it pretext to carry out disproportionate retaliatory actions. As a result, it can cost small Southeast Asian claimant states the claimed territory and a new status quo, for instance in the case of the Philippines in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off. Southeast Asian states are put in a situation in which they must find a way to both stay firm with regard to their commitment to safeguarding their sovereignty and sovereign rights to EEZ and continental shelf resources, and at the same time, remain restrained so as to not provoke China or at least not allow China to escalate the situation to a level where they are unlikely to gain advantage. In the Scarborough Shoal case, the Philippines twice made moves of de-escalation. From the outset, it had to withdraw its warship to de-militarise the situation and then, in the end, it was the first to remove all the ships from the Shoal. But Manila did not provide the Chinese with a pretext in the latter case of Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines, under the Aquino administration (2010–

⁵⁷ For more on the U.S. policy and evolution of U.S. strategy in the South China Sea, see (McDevitt 2015; Liedman 2018; T. Kim 2018; Fravel 2017)

2016), was also the first and the only contender challenging China's claim by using legal action and actively seeking stronger U.S. support. Manila was emboldened largely by its treaty alliance with the U.S. Nevertheless, the inferiority of naval power did not allow Manila to effectively counter Chinese coercion on the ground. For Vietnam, while confronting Chinese vessels and actively internationalising the disputes, Hanoi's policy is always mingled with some degree of restraint and is largely constrained by its geographic proximity with China (T. Kim 2018, 190) and the VCP's efforts to cling to power. While Hanoi has taken some steps to enhance its security ties with the U.S. to hedge against China, Hanoi still has concerns for Chinese reactions and the impact upon party ties with Beijing (Buszynski 2018, 131). Maintaining an overall stable relationship with China is still a high priority in Hanoi's foreign policy and its policy in the maritime disputes in the South China Sea is always formulated through that lens.

10.6. Concluding remarks on rising power and coercive diplomacy

Deriving from the instances in which a rising power employs coercive diplomacy against small states, this study lends support to Korina Kagan's argument on situational and tactical factors. The cases studied suggest that the key factor lies in the situational or contextual factors, which provide the necessary conditions for success. The outcome of coercion is dependent more on situational factors than tactical variables, such as the formulation of demands and threats or the adoption of too tough or too soft tactics. Good tactics might be important, but not to the extent of overriding unfavourable background conditions that constitute the basic underlying context of coercion. Tactics in most of the cases are often guided by the situational context (Kagan 1998, 87).

Success of the coercive diplomacy strategy is the outcome of a combination of a set of conditions. The success of a rising power's *fait accompli* can begin with a pretext exploited from a target's mistake or resulting from a combination of an asymmetry of power between the rising power and the target, and the asymmetry of resolve between a rising power and the external power. In other cases, an asymmetry of interests, a military imbalance and the offer of carrots are combined to ensure the strategy's success. The coercive diplomacy employed by a rising power is ineffective in cases when both the asymmetry of motivation and the counter-coercion by the dominant power are not in its favour.

Cases of the application of coercive diplomacy strategy by a rising power also highlight the importance of the dominant power. The role and the extent of involvement of the dominant power – the U.S. – can be considered a key factor affecting the effectiveness of the rising power's coercive strategy. In some instances, the U.S. is an ally of the target. On other occasions, the U.S. is a partner of the target. The U.S. is, to some extent, considered a target of an 'extended' deterrence of the rising power. In any of these capacities, the action and policy of the U.S. always affect the calculation and every stage of execution of the rising power's coercive diplomacy. The motivation and involvement of the dominant power, derived from the extent to which its interests are engaged in the issues or disputes between the rising power and small states, can undermine the coercion effort either by offering support to the small states, thus emboldening them to resist, or by directly carrying out effective counter-coercion measures to influence the rising power's risk calculation to oblige it to back down rather than risk a foreign intervention or even a military confrontation with a dominant power. In contrast, any signal of lacking interests and ambiguity about its support to the small state can lead to the likelihood of a small state giving in and the encroachment of the rising power.

Rising powers' coercive actions towards a specific target have, to some extent, been judged in the context of a wider pattern of behaviour. The behaviour patterns can generate problems for rising powers in their near abroad in the first place. In the longer term and with a broader perspective, coercion can backfire. Coercive diplomacy employed by rising powers can alienate its neighbours, damage its image, give rise to adverse reactions by regional countries and risk causing strategic isolation (Andrews 2015).

Rising powers, including China, however, will be expected to continue to resort to coercive diplomacy for several reasons. First, coercive diplomacy sometimes works. As Bill Park remarks on the future resort of coercion by regional powers, even where coercive diplomacy does not work, the unresolved issues such as territorial disputes left in place simply provide the pretext for further use of threats to achieve political goals. Hence resorts to coercive diplomacy form part of an enduring pattern of dispute management and of crises in relationships (Park 2009, 267). Furthermore, although coercive diplomacy can arouse negative responses, the strategy remains attractive and fits into the interim status of a rising power that has increasing power to expand its interests but is not strong enough to directly confront a dominant power. The coercive diplomacy strategy promises the rising power political and territorial gains while helping it avoid a military confrontation with regional neighbours or the U.S. Indeed, in spite of the reputational costs, what China has gained so far is substantial and practical. Last but not least, it is the growth of paramilitary and non-traditional capabilities that allow rising powers to implement more frequently low-intensity coercive diplomacy strategy. On the other hand, the diplomatic ramifications will not be as great with a paramilitary as with a military force (Le Mière 2014, 31). Hence, rising powers may be encouraged to make more coercive attempts in the future to achieve foreign policy objectives.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarises the arguments and main findings of this research. It then presents several contributions to the field of coercion and the study of China's international relations. The next section suggests directions for further researches on China's dispute management and outlines several issues to advance research on coercion. Policy implications are addressed in the final section.

11.1. Summary of arguments and main findings

This dissertation examines China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea since 2011. The study explores major factors and how these factors influence the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy against small states in the South China Sea.

Building upon existing research in coercive diplomacy and Christian Le Mière's new approach to gunboat diplomacy, I propose a definition of maritime coercive diplomacy which can cover more subtle and contemporary coercive behaviours at sea and includes the employment of various sea-based tools other than naval forces.

Two important findings emerge from the event dataset of China's coercive behaviour in the South China Sea between 1970 and 2017. First, although the number of Chinese coercive behaviours has varied over time, maritime coercive diplomacy has been used consistently by China since 1970 as a strategy of asserting claims and managing maritime disputes in the South China Sea. In other words, there has been continuity in China's management of its maritime disputes with other Southeast Asian countries with the employment of coercive diplomacy at sea. Second, China's dispute management approach in the South China Sea took a turning point in 2011 as it engaged in the highest number of coercive activities since 1970. This rise in frequency has also been maintained for a much longer period. Drawing on the event data, from 29 coercive actions since 2011, this dissertation analyses and compares five major events, covering eight coercive actions.

Grounding in Alexander George and William Simons' (1994b) coercive diplomacy framework and Korina Kagan (1998)'s refined framework on coercion in asymmetric conflicts, a set of standardised and general questions are formulated. This guides the analysis of each case study and a systematic comparison among these cases in regard to China's interests, coercive objectives, adopted sea-based tools and tactics, as well as the extent to which the asymmetry of motivation, asymmetry of power, the U.S. regional commitment and involvement, and domestic and tactical factors affect the outcome of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy.

Chapter Five examines two incidents in which Chinese vessels cut the seismic cables of two Vietnamese oil survey ships – *Binh Minh 02* and *Viking II* – within Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf in May and June 2011. The chapter finds that China exercised maritime

coercive diplomacy by harassing and physically confronting Vietnam's survey vessels in an effort to deter Vietnam from continuing its oil exploration activities in areas claimed by China and to compel Vietnam to accept joint development. China applied an approach of firmness on the diplomatic front by blaming Vietnam and allowing the media to verbally attack Vietnam. Despite coercive diplomacy efforts, China did not achieve its two main objectives. Vietnam stood its ground by resuming its oil and gas surveys in the very same locations where the incidents occurred and made no attempt to move towards joint development with China. The chapter argues that the asymmetry of motivation in the dispute over natural resources within Vietnam's EEZ and the reaction of the U.S. impacted the outcome and led to the failure of China's coercive diplomacy. The asymmetry of motivation favoured Hanoi, since, for Vietnam, complying with Chinese demands equated to giving up Vietnam's core economic interests and its sovereign rights to the EEZ and continental shelf resources, while oil exploration and exploitation in these areas did not reflect China's urgent and vital interests. Furthermore, the U.S. signalled a greater involvement in South China Sea issues through statements and diplomatic action, as well as through naval exchanges with Vietnam. Risks from the expansion of U.S. involvement in the disputes caused Beijing to adjust its tactics of handling the incidents. However, Hanoi did not desire to let the incidents disrupt its overall relationship with Beijing. Therefore, the asymmetry of military capabilities between China and Vietnam and the asymmetry of motivation, in terms of strategic interests in the region, helped Beijing to successfully achieve its unstated objective of deterring Hanoi from partnering with the U.S. at the expense of Beijing's interests.

Chapter Six analyses China's maritime coercive diplomacy against the Philippines in the Scarborough Shoal stand-off in 2012. The chapter demonstrates that China had a number of specific coercive objectives, including stopping the Philippines from arresting Chinese fishermen, compelling Manila to withdraw its vessels from the Shoal and deterring Manila from intervening in the future activities of Chinese fishermen or Chinese government vessels, thereby accepting a Chinese presence at the Shoal. To achieve these objectives, China used a large number of government and fishing vessels to outnumber the few Philippine ships in the area. China also employed a variety of tools during the stand-off, ranging from imposing informal economic sanctions and conducting military exercises and weapons tests to allowing the media to spread rumours of war. China also used indirect coercion to pressure the Philippines through the U.S. As a result, Beijing effectively deterred Manila from physically contesting China's administration of Scarborough Shoal and achieved its territorial and coercive objectives. It is argued that the balance of motivation and capabilities in the dispute over Scarborough Shoal favoured China from the outset. Due to its inferior military capabilities and the fact that no Filipino personnel were stationed at the Shoal, Manila feared escalation, while China was willing to employ its growing maritime law enforcement capabilities in order to assert its claims and establish a presence at the Shoal. Perhaps more importantly, weak deterrent signalling from the U.S. manifested by ambiguity over the interpretation of the Mutual Defence Treaty and the reiteration of not taking sides contributed to Chinese confidence about making a *fait accompli* without provoking U.S. intervention. However, China failed to achieve the additional objective of compelling the Philippines' leaders to drop their arbitration bid and adopt a less confrontational policy against China. This failure resulted from the fact that the demand went far beyond the Philippines' limited interests in the Scarborough Shoal dispute and would also impact the Philippines' broader maritime claims in the South China Sea. Additionally, despite the weak U.S. deterrent signals during the stand-off, the Philippines is still the U.S.' treaty-ally and gained the U.S. support for its arbitration case.

Chapter Seven demonstrates that China's increasing physical presence at Second Thomas Shoal in 2013 and the implementation of two blockages of Filipino ships from reaching the *BRP Sierra Madre* in 2014 were aimed at deterring Manila from undertaking planned construction, and compelling it to abandon its outpost and cease its pursuit of arbitration, as well as return to bilateral negotiations. None of these objectives were achieved through resorting to maritime coercive diplomacy strategy. Despite Chinese pressure, the Philippines carried out resupply missions to its troops by air and did not drop its construction plans. Moreover, Manila proceeded to challenge Beijing's claims in the South China Sea by submitting the Memorial to the Tribunal. It is argued that the failure of China's maritime coercive diplomacy can be explained by two factors. First, the asymmetry of motivation was in Manila's favour. While the Philippines has its personnel stationed at the Shoal, Beijing does not physically occupy the Shoal, and such an occupation through maritime coercive diplomacy would have been unfavourable for China's rise. The "carrot" that Beijing offered Manila to delay the submission of the Memorial or drop the case altogether could not offset Manila's interests at stake. Second, during the tensions over Second Thomas Shoal, the U.S. exhibited strong counter-coercion signals and reactions ranging from deploying assets to survey China's activities over the Shoal and providing direct assistance to the Philippines in order to challenge China's blockages to issuing vocal support to the Philippines' filing of a case against China. These signals were believed to have deterrent effects on Beijing and to have impeded the effectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy in this case.

Chapter Eight analyses the crisis over the HYSY 981 oil rig's deployment within Vietnam's claimed EEZ and continental shelf. The chapter details the specific coercive objectives that China sought to achieve. China attempted to coerce Vietnam to cease its interference in the oil rig's operations, to withdraw its ships and personnel from the site and to accept China's jurisdiction over the waters it claims in the South China Sea. China relied on non-traditional means of oil rigs in its maritime coercive diplomacy against Vietnam. China also deployed a large flotilla of naval ships, fishing boats, and maritime law enforcement vessels. Beijing, however, failed to achieve its coercive goals. Hanoi not only maintained the presence of its vessels in the area until the oil rig was removed but also repeatedly claimed sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and its jurisdiction over the EEZ and continental shelf. China withdrew the HYSY 981 one month ahead of schedule and has refrained relocating its oil rigs on the Vietnamese side of the hypothetical equidistant line between the coast of Hainan Island and mainland Vietnam in the period since. China's coercive diplomacy failed because of the unclear terms of settlement, an asymmetry of motivation favourable to Vietnam, and the U.S.' reaction. Beijing's messages and signals gave no clear indication of China's ultimate intentions or terms of compliance. Given Vietnam's good relationship with China in the period before the crisis, the sudden deployment of the rig confused Hanoi and prevented the Vietnamese government from backing down in the dispute. Washington also became involved more directly, directing criticism at China for its deployment of the oil rig. However, the most important determinant of the ineffectiveness of China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis was the asymmetry of motivation, which favoured Vietnam. Hanoi's persistence and greater risk acceptance resulted from the location of the oil rig, China's expressed claims to sovereignty over the Paracel Islands as justification for its choice of location and the unprecedented use of a China-made oil rig to conduct drilling exploration activities within Vietnam's claimed EEZ.

China's land reclamation and militarisation activities in the Spratly Islands are examined in Chapter Nine. China's *fait accompli* aimed to strengthening its presence in and control over the Spratlys, changing the status quo without escalating a military retaliation from other claimants, and thereby compelling regional countries to accept Chinese claims in the South China Sea and the regional order that would emerge from the realisation of these claims. China successfully created a new permanent status quo by building seven artificial islands in the Spratlys and constructing major military infrastructure at these outposts without triggering military confrontation or direct interference. While other claimants in the South China Sea disputes have not abandoned their claims over the Spratly Islands, Southeast Asian claimants and the U.S. had no choice but to accept this new status quo. It is argued that the unbridgeable asymmetry of power between China and other weaker claimants made the option of confronting China at sea and stopping the reclamation work unfeasible. At the same time, the asymmetry of motivation was also not favourable to Vietnam, the Philippines or even the U.S., as, under international law, it is not strictly unlawful for China to undertake land reclamation. Hanoi's determination to restore relations with China following the HYSY 981 crisis led it to downplay China's artificial building activities. While China's increasing capacity, budget, and strong political support contributed to a willingness to enact a *fait accompli*, a range of diplomatic and economic initiatives as well as inducement offered to small Southeast Asian countries helped China to prevent a regional backlash. Furthermore, China's willingness was strengthened by its leaders' belief that the South China Sea was more central to China's interests than it was to the U.S. As such, the U.S. failed to deter China from changing the status quo. Delays to and the late conduct of U.S. operations within the 12-nautical-mile zone of Chinese-held features offered China a chance to accelerate its land reclamation project and make gains with a *fait accompli* in the Spratlys.

Chapter Ten provides a thorough comparative analysis, showing that the shift in the regional balance of power and the increase in China's material capabilities have created favourable overarching conditions for China's maritime coercive diplomacy strategy. In all examined cases, Beijing's growing capabilities in the domain of maritime law enforcement, military capability and advanced technology have contributed to decisions to adopt more assertive tactics. They have allowed for enhances physical presences in disputed waters as well as engagement in risky coercive behaviours, including harassing other claimants' vessels, obstructing other claimants' oil and gas exploration activities in China-claimed areas. In order to achieve its territorial and political goals in maritime disputes in the South China Sea, China employed coercive diplomacy by using multiple sea-based forces including naval, paramilitary, and other vessels from multiple agencies, as well as fishing boats. While the PLAN forces were held in reserve, China's high-powered paramilitary forces played a major role in coercive activities. All cases examined in this study indicate that China has been becoming more prepared to employ its growing array of resources and tools at its disposal, including positive and negative economic inducements, political isolation, media as well as unconventional tools, such as oil rigs and dredges, to accomplish its objectives in South China Sea disputes.

The outcomes of China's use of maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea, however, have been mixed. China has failed to get small countries to comply with its demands, as seen in some cases. Several principal findings can be drawn from comparisons of the influence of contextual factors and conditions on the success or failure of China's maritime coercive diplomacy in the examined cases. First, the asymmetry of power is constant and always in China's favour.

Yet, despite its overwhelming preponderance of power, China was not able to get Vietnam or the Philippines to give in in the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis or during Second Thomas Shoal tensions. However, the success of China's coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea in the case of Scarborough Shoal, land reclamation in the Spratlys and in deterring Vietnam from its efforts to seek a closer relationship with the U.S. to a great extent depended on its superiority in material power. The superiority of naval power, the development of maritime law enforcement forces and advanced technologies have enabled China to execute massive land reclamation projects at an extraordinary pace, establish a credible deterrence and instil a fear of "unacceptable escalation" with China and an unwillingness to confront China militarily in order to reverse the status quo.

Second, China's maritime coercive diplomacy proved to be ineffective when the asymmetry of motivation favoured the small states. The intrinsic Vietnamese interest in developing energy resources and the Philippines' security stakes associated with the proximity of the Second Thomas Shoal and its physical control of the Shoal strengthened small states' motivation and engendered their resistance against China's coercion. China, however, was confident and willing to change the status quo in the Spratlys and take control of Scarborough Shoal due to its belief that it possessed asymmetric advantages and higher motivations to change the status quo in these areas than the U.S. and small states in the South China Sea had to protect it. Besides the asymmetry of motivation fixed by the nature of the dispute, China has also managed to create asymmetries in its favour by offering positive economic inducements, which proved to be effective in the case of land reclamation.

Third, the reaction and involvement of the U.S. is a key contextual factor that has an impact on the implementation and outcomes of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. Strong reactions and deterrent signals from the U.S. either embolden small states to resist or influence China's risk calculations, obliging restraint in coercive actions. China adopted some adjustments to its tactics during the cable-cutting incidents and displayed restraint over Second Thomas Shoal when the U.S. signalled a greater commitment and strong and direct involvement in the disputes. On the contrary, China gained momentum and the confidence to advance its interests in Scarborough Shoal and the Spratlys when the U.S. deterrence was weak, ambiguous and slow.

Fourth, with regard to domestic factors, there is no evidence that competition amongst government agencies had an effect on the outcome of China's maritime coercive diplomacy. In fact, there is a clear evidence of a coordination. The study shows that public opinion has been employed by both Vietnamese and Chinese leaders as political card that serves their foreign policy. While the Beijing leadership exploited nationalist public opinion to pressure small states, Hanoi used it to demonstrate its resolve and express the displeasure. While public opinion manifested in demonstrations and protests and, to some extent, put pressure on Hanoi in the case of HYSY 981, it did not play an important role in determining Hanoi's resistance and its overall policy towards China.

Fifth, the most notable tactical factor identified is the lack of clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement. This factor is present in the case of the HYSY 981 oil rig crisis and proved to have an important impact on Hanoi's refusal to meet Beijing's demands. The lack of clarity and consistency in the coercing states' signals and policies severely constrained the possibilities for productive bargaining with the opponent.

Sixth, the combination of two key factors in asymmetry of motivation favourable to the small target country and strong deterrent signals from the U.S. makes the coercive diplomacy ineffective. This study also supports the argument of previous researchers that situational factors are more important than tactical factors in influencing the outcome of the use of coercive diplomacy.

11.2. Contributions

This dissertation both draws from and tries to develop several literatures. It provides three contributions to the field of coercion and several contributions to the study of China's international relations.

For the field of coercion, first, as it is not limited to the study of conventional military coercion, the study explores cases of coercive diplomacy that rely on multiple sea-based forces. Applying this approach, this study includes subtle forms of coercive diplomacy and broadens the number of observations. The findings on how various assets, such as paramilitary forces and non-military tools, have been used and how Chinese leaders implemented these forms of coercive diplomacy to influence the target's behaviour and policies contribute to a more complete understanding of this increasingly important form of rivalry and statecraft using low-intensity coercion. It offers policymakers as well as scholars a broad-ranging and insightful assessment of the contemporary use of this strategy.

Second, the study refines the generic knowledge about coercive diplomacy and adds to our understanding of the uses and limitations of coercive diplomacy by exploring the experiences of a rising power. As Alexander George (1991a, xv) noted, "[g]eneric knowledge of coercive diplomacy remains provisional and incomplete. It will and should continue to be refined with the study of additional historical cases [...]". This study adheres to these guidelines by providing and analysing fresh cases of coercive diplomacy by a rising power.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the current frameworks and findings rely on the experiences of U.S. or Western coalitions, such that there is a lack of research on how other states have used coercive diplomacy. This study analyses cases in which the strategy has been employed by a non-Western and rising power. On the one hand, the new case studies based on China's experience support the major findings of earlier researches on U.S. cases, which claim that coercive diplomacy is an attractive tool of foreign policy but is also a difficult undertaking. The possession of military superiority over the target does not by itself guarantee success in coercive diplomacy. Also, coercive diplomacy exhibits mixed results at best (Art and Cronin 2003, 402). In this respect, the coercive diplomacy practiced by China, is not exceptional. On the other hand, exploring a rising power's employment of coercive diplomacy provides new insights into the complications of coercive diplomacy and the risks associated with the use of the strategy. A rising power does not possess a capability advantage to change the status quo and prevail in a conflict with the dominant power. Thus, coercive diplomacy by a rising power does not just rely on military forces, but also resorts to all available tools at its disposal. Furthermore, while Art and Cronin referred to case studies of the U.S.' use of coercive diplomacy and concluded that a state should "never resort to coercive diplomacy unless you are prepared to go to war should it fail" (Art and

Cronin 2003, 402), the majority of researches on coercive diplomacy confirms that coercive diplomacy often fails, which presents U.S. policymakers with a hard choice between war and political retreat. In the case of a rising power's use of coercive diplomacy, and particularly maritime coercive diplomacy, at the current stage, however, the inherent risk is primarily the deeper involvement of the dominant power and the cost is mainly related to image or reputation and diplomatic cost. This makes coercive diplomacy a much more attractive tool of foreign policy to achieve political and security goals for rising powers.

Third, by exploring a specific form of maritime coercive diplomacy employed by a rising power, the study contributes to the theory and the body of knowledge relating to the conditions that favour or impede the effective use of coercive diplomacy. Earlier research on coercive diplomacy emphasised that the relative motivation of the two sides plays an important role in determining the outcome. This study echoes these earlier findings that situational or contextual factors are more influential on the outcome of coercion than tactical ones. However, the general framework on coercive diplomacy can be improved by reformulating this so that the emphasis is placed upon the reaction and involvement of the dominant power. Although this factor is mentioned in earlier research, it has previously been analysed under the general condition of "adequate international support". By examining the circumstances in which a rising power employs coercive diplomacy, this study suggests that to a great extent, the U.S. deterrence and involvement influence the decision calculus, threat perceptions and risk calculation of a rising power, thereby affecting the strategy selected, its implementation and the overall outcome. Therefore, it highlights coercion as a dynamic process. It is important to understand coercion not only through the actions undertaken by the coercing and coerced states, but also by understanding the international context, especially the actions and interests of the allies of the coercer and the target. In the case of coercive diplomacy employed by rising powers, the interests and responses of third parties, and particularly the dominant power, must be considered.

With regard to the study of Chinese foreign policy, this dissertation fills some gaps and contributes to the field in several ways. First, the dissertation makes effort to bring the study of China's foreign policy more closely in touch with coercion theory. Through the use of theoretical and analytical frameworks developed in the coercion literature, our knowledge of China's foreign policy behaviour is enriched. In one sense, China is not treated as an exception; however, the incorporation has helped to identify patterns and differences in China's behaviours when influencing other states' policies and managing the disputes with its neighbours.

Second, as coercive diplomacy is a strategy of crisis management, the present study contributes to our understanding of China's crisis management behaviour. However, because this dissertation examines cases below the military-involved crisis, it has shed light on the dynamics of and variation within China's behaviour in the situations of 'near-crisis' or 'foreign policy crisis', which has so far lacked scholarly attention.

Third, this dissertation also considers coercive diplomacy as a strategy for China to manage its territorial disputes. As many scholars note, while China has compromised mostly in frontier disputes on land, China has rarely considered to compromise and has almost never entered into negotiations over the sovereignty of contested features in the Paracels and the Spratlys. China has regularly resorted to coercive diplomacy to assert its claims and strengthen its position over the

disputed areas at sea. Previous studies have only treated China's escalation in territorial disputes through examining its use of force, yet China's coercive diplomacy has never been studied as a territorial dispute management strategy. This research, which analyses China's coercive diplomacy as one form of escalation strategy, has enhanced knowledge about China's territorial dispute behaviour.

Finally, existing studies and even the latest works analysing the same cases of China's 'grey-zone' coercion in maritime disputes primarily describe how China used this strategy to change the status quo. Also, they have made conclusions on the success of China's coercion on the basis of what China has changed on the ground. There is a lack of a more nuanced assessment of the outcome of China's coercive diplomacy. Unsurprisingly, these studies fail to offer explanations for the ineffectiveness and mixed outcome of China's use of coercive strategy. By contrast, this dissertation examines each of China's demands and the degree to which it is met by the target states so as to evaluate the outcome of Chinese coercive diplomacy. Thus, this study provides a thorough assessment of the extent to which China's coercive diplomacy has helped China achieve its aims. It also develops a more precise explanation for the observed effectiveness and ineffectiveness of China's coercive diplomacy. By comparing China's coercive diplomacy against different targets in the same maritime disputes and toward the same target in different crises, this study identifies and highlights determinants of the success and failure of China's coercive strategies.

11.3. Areas for further research

This section suggests directions for further research on China's dispute management and outlines several issues that need to be addressed and analysed for scholars to advance coercion research program.

This project could be extended by examining additional cases of China's maritime coercive diplomacy in two following directions. First, the latest incidents taking place in the South China Sea could be explored. While this study examines incidents and crises occurring in the period between 2011 and 2017, there are more cases of Chinese maritime coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea are worthy of analytical examination – for instance, the cases of Beijing's coercion to get Hanoi to suspend two oil drilling projects within the latter's continental shelf in July 2017 and March 2018, and the tense stand-off between China and Vietnam at Vanguard Bank from July to October 2019. China's latest harassment of Vietnam's oil development operations would provide an opportunity to explore whether the asymmetry of motivation has changed in comparison with that in the cases of 2011 and 2014, and, if this is the case, then how it is likely to affect Vietnam's response and the outcome of China's coercive diplomacy. The second direction is by expanding the number of cases to include China's coercion in maritime disputes in the East China Sea, thereby expanding the limited geographic scope of this study. Beijing's employment of maritime coercive diplomacy is not limited to maritime disputes in the South China Sea. In fact, as mentioned previously, China also has maritime disputes in the East China Sea with Japan and South Korea. In the territorial disputes with Japan over the Senkaku Islands, China also used maritime coercion along with economic coercion towards Japan in various cases, notably two crises in 2010 and 2012. Therefore, such research could further explore China's exercise of maritime coercion to manage its maritime disputes and compare China's dispute management approaches in the East and South China Seas. This would also develop a more comprehensive understanding of China's dispute

management towards targets with which the U.S. has differing levels of military relations and security commitments.

Another potential extension of this research is to include cases in which China has exercised coercive diplomacy in territorial disputes on land. In recent years, regional and international observers and policy-makers have not only get caught by China's coercive activities at sea but also by its coercive behaviour on land. For example, in mid-June 2017, PLA construction crews began to extend a road in the area known as Doklam, which is claimed by both China and Bhutan. China's construction triggered a stand-off involving a few hundred troops deployed by China and Bhutan's ally, India, which lasted for two months.⁵⁸ The attempt to build a road in the remote and disputed corner of the Himalayas and the construction of outposts in disputed features in the Spratlys share similarities regarding China's coercive tactics to consolidate and expand its control. Further research could cover cases of China's coercion on land and at sea, thereby providing useful insights into China's usage of coercive diplomacy strategies to manage unresolved territorial disputes with neighbours. The addition of empirical cases would also be helpful in generating more diverse conditions and evaluating their effects on the success or failure of coercive strategies.

One limitation of this study is that it has not covered and analysed all important aspects of the domestic factor. This research examines only public opinion as manifested in the number, frequency and timing of anti-China demonstrations in Vietnam, the powerful business groups' pressure in the case of the Philippines, and China's bureaucratic pluralism. However, another important aspect of the domestic factor that deserves a deeper analysis is the role of the top leaders and their influence on the foreign policy. Further research could explore the top leaders' political survival status and how the presence of strong and effective top-level political leadership affects the implementation and outcome of coercive diplomacy strategies. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the domain of actions of key Chinese policymakers during crises and the impact of the domestic factor on China's coercive strategy as well as the target(s)' counter-coercion.

To further advance coercion research programme, more cases are needed and comparisons must be made with the use of this strategy by other rising powers. One of the best potential candidates would be Russia. An in-depth comparison of other rising powers' use of coercive diplomacy to achieve foreign policy objectives would allow for the establishment of generalisable claims about the determinants of coercive diplomacy's success and failure with regard to rising powers.

Lastly, I suggest a future research direction focusing on developing and refining our understanding of asymmetric deterrence. Much of the existing literature considers how the strong coerces and/or deters the weak. This study itself narrows down the scope to examine only China's coercive diplomacy against small states and focuses less on other asymmetric conflicts between a rising power and a dominant power. An increasing number of cases in the South China Sea in the recent years highlight that the U.S. is not the only actor in the Asia-Pacific region resorting to deterrence, but that China is also applying asymmetric deterrence against the U.S. in order to

⁵⁸ For more on China's coercion and the stand-off at Doklam, see: (Mastro and Tarapore 2017)

protect its security interests, and consolidate and expand its influence within the region. From 2009 to present, there have been a number of high-profile incidents in which Chinese vessels and aircraft have harassed U.S. naval ships. These include U.S. *Impeccable* and *Victorious* incidents in March and May 2009, respectively. In September 2018, a Chinese destroyer was claimed to have harassed the U.S. Navy destroyer *Decatur* when it was sailing near Gaven Reef in the Spratlys. These are some of the manifestations of asymmetric deterrence that China has exercised to prohibit U.S. military activities in its claimed EEZ and waters, expand its control in maritime Southeast Asia in the short term and keep the U.S. at bay in the long term. China enjoys the advantage of geographic proximity, but as a rising power, it suffers from military capability asymmetry vis-à-vis the dominant power. Policy-makers and academics alike would benefit from a detailed analysis of asymmetric deterrence, how China exercises asymmetric deterrence, and the impact of internal and external constraints upon deterrence strategy choices under asymmetric conditions. It is important that we not only consider China's coercion against small neighbouring countries but also examine how China relies upon and adapts asymmetric deterrence to counter the U.S.' dominance in the region.

11.4. Policy implications

In the context of unresolved maritime disputes and growing strategic competition between China and the U.S. in the South and East China Seas, this section addresses the relevant policy implications that this research provides. First, China is highly calculative and carefully calibrates its coercive actions. The anticipated reaction of the dominant power forms an important part in its calculation. In the recent discussion on how to respond to China's aggression, some scholars and policy-makers emphasise the need to avoid an unnecessary spiral of hostility, implying that an increasing involvement in disputes and hard-line behaviour from the U.S. could push China towards revisionism and aggression. While to some extent such concerns are valid, this study shows that a moderate and soft response from the U.S. in the context of China's growing power actually invites more coercive behaviour. Restraint, as prompted by a fear of provoking China and causing escalation from the U.S. and other claimants, has been exploited by China and has contributed to Chinese success in coercion. On the contrary, the willingness of the U.S. and other countries to accept the risk and respond strongly and clearly in the face of the coercive behaviour and aggressive foreign policy of a rising power can prompt the rising power to adjust its strategy.

In the context of maritime disputes, the U.S. itself has had to mitigate the tension between its greater involvement in order to manage tensions and its reluctance to avoid being caught in a conflict with China. Furthermore, this study finds evidence that coordination between the U.S. and other claimants and the combination of asymmetry of motivation in favour of the targeted state and strong deterrent signals from the U.S. can effectively push back China's coercive behaviour. In fact, there is a gap between the U.S.' regional commitments, its claimed interests and the expectations of its allies and partners. The U.S. should narrow this gap by deepening cooperation with allies, strengthening security relationships with partners, and providing security assistance to countries in the region. Strong cooperation and coordination mechanisms are needed to respond more effectively to new provocations as well as to better control escalation.

Second, this research demonstrates that the costs for China of using coercive diplomacy have so far been predominantly reputational, while what China has made territorial and foreign

policy gains. As long as the practical gains outweigh the reputational costs, China will continue to rely on coercive diplomacy to challenge the status quo. To counter China's maritime coercive diplomacy or deter its efforts to aggressively expand its influence, it is necessary that regional countries and the dominant power – the U.S. – make it clear to China that the costs of coercion would extend beyond reputational costs, to include economic, institutional and strategic costs.

In addition, from the point of view of grand strategy, Beijing's coercion involves diplomatic, military, economic, legal, and information instruments. The U.S., therefore, should leverage all these tools of statecraft to improve its relative position in all areas of 'grey zone' competition.

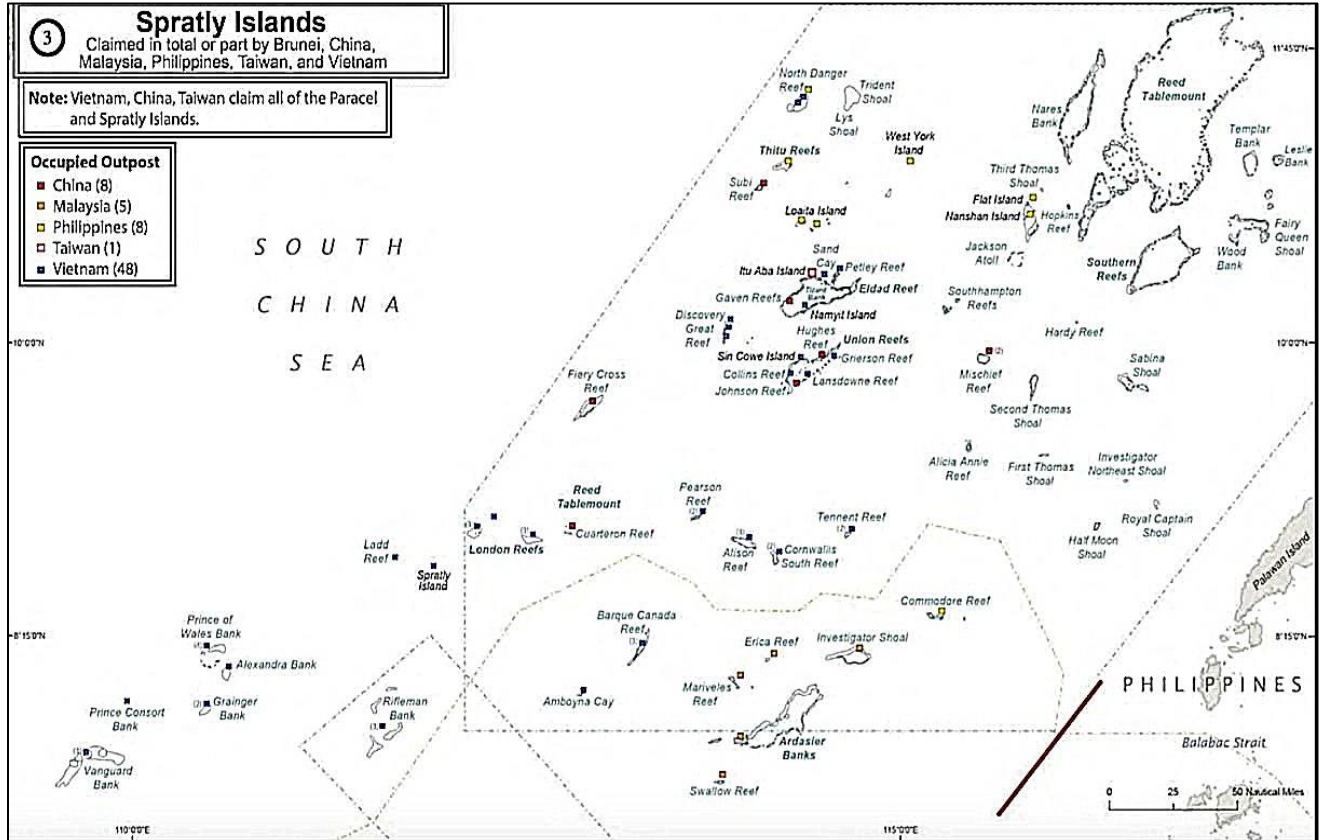
Within the context of growing U.S.-China competition in the South and East China Seas, this study has confirmed the importance of the asymmetry of motivation in determining the outcome, but also implies that, for a strategy to counter China to be effective, the U.S. government needs to correctly identify the U.S. goals to be pursued and prioritise what is at stake for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region. It should be followed by an adequate allocation of resources commensurate with the importance it attaches to the region. Without such clarification, Chinese leaders' belief in an asymmetry of motivation in China's favour is deepened.

For regional states and particularly Southeast Asian claimants, it is apparent that their economic relationship and initiatives offered by China are the main factors to make them think twice before deciding to challenge China's coercion. China has also taken advantage of these economic inducements to reduce its adversaries' motivation to resist Chinese demands, thereby creating an asymmetry of motivation in its favour. Even when small countries decide to challenge China, their resistance is limited due to the sheer asymmetry of capabilities. However, it is not certain that adopting an 'appeasement' policy can guarantee a more moderate action from Beijing. The Philippines under the Duterte administration provides a vivid example. Completely rejecting President Aquino's approach of confronting China's maritime claims and balancing against China, Duterte has acquiesced to Beijing's desire to jointly explore natural resources in disputed parts of the South China Sea and has undertaken measures to accommodate Beijing's security interests at the expense of the Philippine-U.S. alliance (De Castro 2017, 11,17; 2018, 180). Despite Duterte's efforts, China has continued the harassment of Philippine resupply vessels to Second Thomas Shoal and has dispatched a large number of vessels to discourage Manila's long-planned upgrades at the Philippine-occupied Thitu. Therefore, on the one hand, it seems that small countries should resort to legal tools to challenge China's claims and coercion. While some have argued that since China ignored the PCA ruling, there appears that the ruling and international law have had no constraint on China's increasingly assertive behaviour, it is arguable that it is not international law itself but the political will of small countries to use legal tools to counter China, which would make them effective. As long as the Philippines sets aside the PCA ruling and Hanoi is reluctant to take legal action, China will continue to ignore the ruling. As China is now making greater efforts to challenge other claimants' sovereign rights to resources within their EEZs and continental shelves, the legal option should be considered. In Hanoi's case, by using international law to resolve disputes and supporting the existing international conventions and norms, as well as reiterating the support for a rules-based maritime order, sharing common values could help it get closer to the U.S. without triggering strategic retaliation from China. On the other hand, Southeast Asian claimants should adopt a hard-line approach and contest China's coercive actions. China's current and potentially short- and medium-term efforts would focus on pressuring small countries to stop

or accept joint development in their EEZs and continental shelves, which are located along the outer edge of the nine-dash line. This study shows that the asymmetry of motivation can be favourable to small countries because of the proximity of these areas to their mainlands, their rights protected by UNCLOS, and the unacceptable consequences and implications for their claims if they do not protect these rights. Thus, small countries should take advantage of this favourable asymmetry. Lastly, small countries should employ public diplomacy and gain international support by promoting press coverage of Chinese coercive behaviours.

Appendix

Appendix A: Spratly Islands



Source: US Department of Defence, 'The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy' (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Defence, 2015), 7, at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=786636> (accessed on 23 July 2017)

Appendix B: Event data on China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea 1970–2017

Appendix B.1. China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea in the 1970s

Year 1970s	Total	China's coercive actions	Sources
1970	0	-	
1971	1	China built a harbour and a wharf on Woody Island in Paracels, which served as the PLA's first military base in the disputed area in the South China Sea.	(Garver 1992, 1001)
1972	0	-	
1973	0	-	
1974	1	On 19–20 January, China used force to invade and seize the South Vietnam-held Crescent Group in the Paracels.	
1975	0	-	
1976	0	-	
1977	0	-	
1978	1	China intensified infrastructural construction in the Paracel Islands. In 1978, an airstrip was built on Woody Island.	(Garver 1992, 1007)
1979	1	In April, China apprehended one Vietnamese vessels and detained 24 Vietnamese military personnel for nearly a year after they allegedly came within 500 metres of a Chinese-held island and fired on a Chinese patrol boat.	(<i>China's Foreign Relations: A Chronology of Events (1949-1988)</i> 1989, 300, 304) cited in (Garver 1992, 1008)

Appendix B.2: China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea in the 1980s

Year 1980s	Total	China's coercive actions	Sources
1980	0	-	
1981	1	Within less than a month, Peking conducted two big military exercises in Hebei about 160 km from Peking and around Hainan island in the Gulf of Tonkin. The military exercise around Hainan Island was not limited to Chinese territorial waters, but also took place close to the 17th Parallel. The military exercises were conducted while China was stepping up its armed provocations in all the northern Vietnamese border provinces.	(<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i> 1981), Section: Part 3 the Far East, FE/6858/A3/4, 20 October 1981
1982	2	In March, China deployed 40 war ships in the waters around 4-10 nautical miles from Binh Tri Thien province of Vietnam. Vietnam claimed that one Vietnamese fishing boat was damaged.	(Van Dyke and Bennett 1993, footnote 13)
		The PLA constructed a harbour on Triton Island	(Lo 1989, 118) cited in (Chemillier-Gendreau 2000)
1983	0	-	
1984	0	-	
1985	0	-	
1986	0	-	
1987	2	From 16 May to 6 June, PLAN chief admiral Liu Huaqing ordered PLAN's first combat patrol in the Spratly Islands. The patrol included two "operational exercises".	(<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i> 1987), Section: Part 3 The Far East, FE/8594/A3/1, 15 June 1987; (Xu 1999, 309; H. Liu 2004, 494) quoted in (Fravel 2008, 293)
		Between mid-October and late November, China also conducted military manoeuvres in the western part of the Pacific Ocean and the southern part of the South China Sea with the participation of submarines and aircraft of the Chinese fleet. The Chinese navy once again carried out a series of exercises in the Spratlys which extended as far as James Shoal. The series of naval exercises was to improve the Chinese Navy's potentials for field operations and demonstrate the possibility of China's participation in combat activities far from its coastal areas.	(Zhongguo Xinwen She 1987; VNA 1987; Xinhua 1988; Chang 1990, 24)
1988	3	On 13–14 March, the PRC used military force against Vietnam, establishing its first foothold in the Spratly Islands.	
		On 11 June, according to the <i>People's Daily</i> , Fiery Cross Reef construction was being	(L. Zhang 1996, 162) cited in (Chubb 2016),

		accelerated, and an artificial harbour and reclaimed island appeared on the reef	(Garver 1992, 1011–12; Chang 1990, 27)
		On 3 August, a major naval exercise code-named <i>Guangzi-15</i> was conducted by the Guangzhou Military Region to assess the navy's ability to test the PLA's ability in both coastal defence and the protection of islands claimed by China in the South China Sea	(Godwin 1997, 204)
1989	1	On 5 February, China began the construction of harbours on Duncan, Woody, East and Triton Islands in the Paracels. The air base on Woody Island was also enlarged.	(<i>Nasha.Org.Cn</i> 2005; Garver 1992, 1014)

Appendix B.3. China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea in the 1990s

Year 1990s	Total	China's coercive actions	Sources
1990	0	-	
1991	1	In late May, China conducted combat exercises aiming at dispatching small craft in the Spratly Islands, which led to protest from Vietnam	(<i>Nasha.Org.Cn</i> 2005)
1992	2	On 4 July, China sent naval landing ships and other ships to Gaven Reef (in Chinese: Nanxun Jiao) to erect a stone tablet indicating sovereignty and to transport building materials onto the reef island.	(Ta Kung Pao 1992; <i>Nasha.Org.Cn</i> 2005)
		In September, two Chinese ships erected a drilling platform in a disputed area of the Gulf of Tonkin in the area of 107–108 degrees longitude and 18–20 degrees latitude that China and VN had earlier agreed to leave vacant and temporarily suspend their oil exploration.	(VOV 1992; VNA 1992; Thayer 2002, 273–74)
1993	1	On 5–10 May, a Chinese seismic survey ship intruded into Vietnam's southern continental shelf. The survey ship interfered with oil exploration vessels working for British Petroleum and India's Oil & Natural Gas Commission under a contract with Vietnam's Oil & Gas Corp. The Chinese ship was operating near a disputed area of the South China Sea where Beijing awarded a concession to Crestone Energy Corp.	(FEER 1993, 14)
1994	3	On 12 May, a number of Chinese naval vessels were dispatched to the Tu Chinh (Vanguard Bank) coral reef area where Crestone carried out seismological surveys.	(Kyodo News Service 1994; D. Tran 2002, 210–11)
		On 21 July, it reported that China sent naval ships to blockade operations of a Vietnamese oil rig in the waters of Tu Chinh (Vanguard Bank). The Chinese warships drove back at least one Vietnamese ship carrying supplies to the oil prospecting facilities.	(<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i> 1994; <i>BBC</i> 1994; Amer 2002, 11; D. Tran 2002, 210–11)
		In December, China took control of Mischief Reef and began the construction of shelters on the Reef	(A. C. Guan 2000, 206; VOV 1995)
1995	2	In January/February, China constructed military bunkers on Mischief Reef and sent nine warships to be present in the area for many days.	(A. C. Guan 2000, 206; Storey 1999, 97; VOV 1995)
		On 13 May, China's fishery administrative ship No.34 blocked the Philippine naval frigate and patrol boat at the entrance of Mischief Reef leading to a stand-off, which ended with the withdrawal of the Philippine ships and China's success in taking control of the Reef	(N. Ghosh 1995b; 1995a)
1996	0	-	
1997	2	From 7 March to 4 April, China had sent its Kantan Oil Platform No.3 together with two pilot ships No. 206 and 208 to carry out exploratory oil drilling in areas lying within Vietnam's claimed continental shelf between the coordinates 17°13'45''N latitude and 108°39'30''E longitude	(VOV 1997; Amer 2002, 19–20; Will 1998, 18)

		On 7 May, Philippines protested against PLAN warships approaching two features of Kota (Loaita Island) and Panata (Lankiam)	(Richardson 1997) cited in (Chubb 2016, 341)
1998	1	China began to build new architectural structures in the Mischief Reef area.	(VNA 1999a; Chubb 2016, 341)
1999	1	In March, China was reportedly building an over 7,000-foot runway and a military base in the Paracel Islands	(VNA 1999b)

Appendix B.4: China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea in the 2000s

Year 2000s	Total	China's coercive actions	Sources
2000	0	-	
2001	2	On 18 June, it reported that China deployed anti-ship missiles (HY-2) in the Woody Island in the Paracels.	(VNA 2001a, 7)
		In late June, China deployed 12 naval ships to Spratly Islands for weeks, two of which were dispatched to Scarborough Shoal in 18 June. China built military constructions in Fiery Cross, Cuarteron, and Johnson South Reef and strengthened outpost in Mischief Reef.	(VNA 2001b, 2–3)
2002	2	In June, China imposed a sea ban and held live-fire military exercise for five days in maritime areas that included Vietnam-claimed "sea and continental shelf".	(Amer 2010, 265–66)
		According to the Philippine military, China reinforced its reef outposts in the Spratly archipelago	(Kyodo News Service 2002) cited in (Chubb 2016, 342)
2003	1	Katan III oil rig was deployed in the east area of Vietnam's oil Block 113	(VNMOFA 2014f)
2004	1	On 19 November, China sent the research vessel <i>Nanhai 215</i> and dispatched Kantan 3 oil drilling platform to start operation in an area of 17°26'42''N latitude and 108°19'05''E longitude, which was on the Vietnamese side of the Gulf of Tonkin demarcation line. It operated there from 19 November to 31 December.	(Amer 2010; US DOS 2005)
2005	1	On 8 January, Chinese Maritime Police shot Vietnamese fishing boats in the Gulf of Tonkin that led to the death of 9 Vietnamese fishermen. Other 8 Vietnamese fishermen were arrested.	(VNMOFA 2005; US DOS 2005)
2006	0	-	
2007	3	In July, a group of Vietnamese boats fishing in waters near the Woody Island reportedly came "under fire" from Chinese naval vessels. One fisherman was reportedly killed, several others were injured, and one of the Vietnamese boats sank after the attack.	(US DOS 2007; The Straits Times 2007)
		In late June, CMS ship rammed Vietnamese ships, which blocked a survey ship from China's state-owned oil company CNPC from conducting a seismic survey, approximately 47 nautical mile west of Triton Island. Some called it 'Triton 626 Incident'.	(CCTV4 2013; Bentley 2014)
		In July, the Chinese Navy dispatched one warship in the southern part of the SCS in order to compel Vietnam to stop its hydrographic campaign for gathering the data needed to determine the extension of its continental shelf.	(T. T. Tran 2011, 185)
2008	2	In September, the PLAN vessels interfered with Vietnamese continental shelf surveys. Chinese vessels harassed Russian and Norwegian vessels contracted by the Vietnamese government to explore the continental shelf.	(US DOS 2009)
		The number of incidents involving China's expulsions, confiscation of catches and damaging of Vietnamese fishing boats in the waters of the Paracel Islands increased from more than 100 in 2007 to 313 in 2008.	(Fisheries Administration 2008, 138; 2009, 150) cited in (Chubb 2016, 342),

			(T. T. Tran 2011, 184; Thayer 2008, 20)
2009	1	<p>According to Vietnamese sources, the number of detentions and harassment of Vietnamese fishing boats in the waters of the Paracels peak at 33 for the year.</p> <p>(In September, Chinese armed officers fired at 16 Vietnamese fishing boats while seeking shelter from a storm in the Paracel Islands; and in December: China arrested 3 Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracel Islands, seized 2 boats with equipment and the catch)</p>	(Fravel 2011, 305; Amer 2014, 20–21)

Appendix B.5. China's maritime coercion in the South China Sea in 2010s

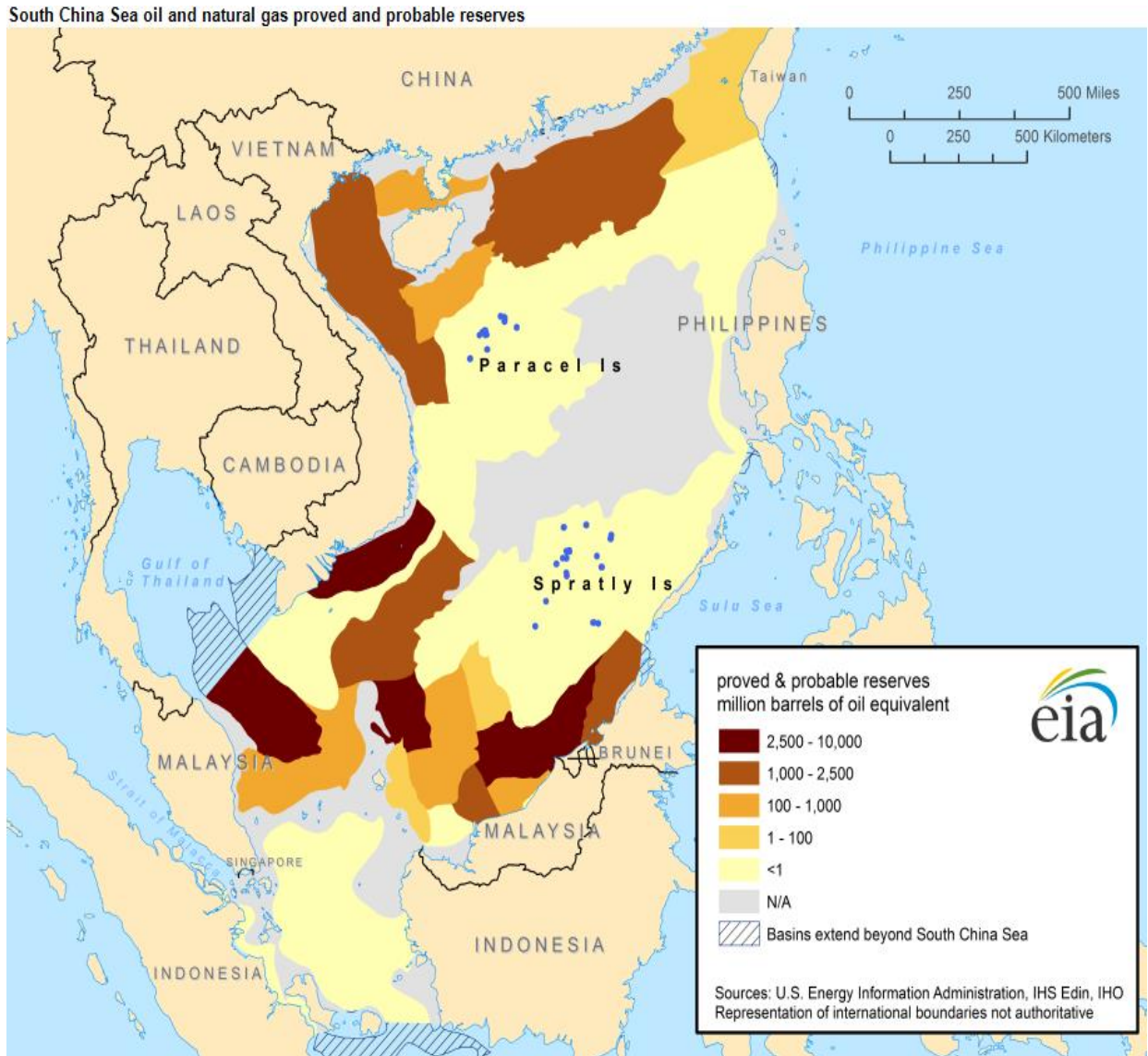
Year 2010s	Total	China's coercive actions	Sources
2010	1	In May, PRC sends survey ship M/V Western Spirit with unprecedentedly large fleet of escort ships to conduct seismic surveys near Triton of Paracel Islands	(T. T. Tran 2011b, 11; Martinson 2016, 199)
2011	5	In February, a Chinese naval vessel fired shots at three Philippine fishing vessels near Jackson Atoll in the disputed Spratly Islands, while in March, two Chinese patrol boats <i>Haijian 71</i> and <i>75</i> threatened to ram the Philippines' research vessel near Reed Bank.	(CSIS 2019)
		In May, Chinese CMS vessel cut the cables of Vietnamese seismic survey ships – the <i>Binh Minh 02</i> – in Vietnam's oil Block 148 within Vietnam-claimed EEZ and continental shelf.	(CSIS 2019) (more on chapter Five)
		On 24 May, a China Maritime Surveillance vessel and PLAN ships reportedly unloaded steel posts, building materials, erected an undetermined number of posts, and placed a buoy near the Amy Douglas Bank.	(Pasaylo 2011; Orendain 2011; Thayer 2011a, 562)
		In June, three Chinese military vessels reportedly used guns to threaten a Vietnamese fishing boat when it was fishing in the waters of the Spratly Islands; one incident occurred in July, in which a Chinese naval vessel chased Vietnamese fishermen, Chinese soldiers boarded the vessel, seized the catch and beat Vietnamese fishing captain near Paracel Islands.	(<i>Thanhnie News</i> 2011d; CSIS 2019)
		In June, Chinese vessels severed the cables of another Vietnamese seismic survey ship – the <i>Viking II</i> – working within Vietnam-claimed EEZ and continental shelf. Amid the tension, China held the first joint armed exercises with the participation of the PLAN forces and units from civilian agencies of Chinese Maritime Police and Marine Surveillance.	(CSIS 2019); (CCTV 2011a; R. Liu and Sun 2015, 768) (more on Chapter Five)
2012	4	On 22 February, Chinese patrol vessel allegedly fired incendiary shells, boarded Vietnamese fishing vessel, and sprayed fire hoses at the fishermen to prevent them from reaching the Paracel Islands to seek refuge from bad weather.	(CSIS 2019)
		From 8 April to 15 June, China coerced the Philippines' boats at Scarborough Shoal. Following the incident, China has taken de facto control over the shoal.	(CSIS 2019) (more on Chapter Six)
		On 21 August, Chinese maritime surveillance vessels reportedly made (first) attempted to harass Malaysian exploration ships within Malaysian continental shelf	(T. T. Tran 2013, 7–8)
		Approximately 5–6 military exercises conducted by the PLAN in the South China Sea were announced in 2012.	(Chubb 2016, 343)
2013	3	From March to July, in two incidents, Chinese vessels harassed Vietnamese fishing boats. In March, <i>Haijian 786</i> approached a Vietnamese fishing vessel returning to Vietnam from the waters near the Paracel Islands and shot off flares. In July, a Chinese vessel chased two Vietnamese fishing boats near Woody Island, then confiscated equipment, and destroyed property	(CSIS 2019)

		On 21 May, the Philippines confirmed that a flotilla of around 30 Chinese fishing vessels, two China Marine Surveillance ships and one warship were at Second Thomas Shoal for more than a week. From mid-2013 to November 2013, China dispatched military and fishing vessels to Second Thomas Shoal and maintained regular surveillance and patrol activities in waters surrounding the shoal.	(Tamayo 2013; Lee-Brago and Romero 2013) (more on Chapter Seven)
		The PLA exercises in the South China Sea increased dramatically to at least 12	(Chubb 2016, 343)
2014	5	China carried out large-scale land reclamation projects creating artificial islands in the Spratlys	(more on Chapter Nine)
		Vietnamese fishing boats continued to be harassed by Chinese vessels near the Paracel Islands. In January, a Chinese naval vessel chased, boarded a Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands and destroyed the ship's assets. In March, Chinese fishery administration ship <i>Yuzheng 02</i> stopped a Vietnamese fishing near the Paracel Islands, boarded it and seized the assets. In August, Chinese coast guard vessel approached Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands, the crew boarded the fishing vessel and seized the catch and broke the fishermen's equipment. In November, a Chinese coast guard vessel rammed and shot water cannons at a Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands.	(CSIS 2019)
		On 27 January, a Chinese coast guard, <i>Haijing 3063</i> , fired its water cannons at Philippine fishing vessels near Scarborough Shoal	(CSIS 2019)
		On 9 March, Chinese coast guard ships blocked and temporarily disrupted the Philippines' delivery of supplies to the <i>Sierra Madre</i> in the Second Thomas Shoal for several weeks.	(CSIS 2019) (more on Chapter Seven)
		From 1 May to 15 July, China deployed an oil rig into waters off the disputed Paracel Islands and created a two-month crisis between China and Vietnam.	(CSIS 2019) (more on Chapter Eight)
2015	4	Harassment of Vietnamese fishing boats by Chinese vessels increased sharply in 2015. In January, according to Vietnamese media, Chinese forces boarded, smashed fishery equipment and stole the catch of Vietnamese fishing boats in the Paracel Islands. In June, the Chinese coast guard used water cannons on Vietnamese fishermen in the water near the Paracel Islands. Also, in June, four Chinese coast guard vessels approached Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands. Chinese officers boarded the vessel, stole the catch and damaged their property. In late July, three Chinese coast guard vessels approach a Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands. Chinese officers boarded the boat and seized the catch and equipment. In September, a Vietnamese fishing boat was rammed and boarded by the crew of at least one Chinese vessel near the Paracel Islands.	(CSIS 2019)
		On 13 November, four Chinese vessels, including two coast guard ships and a warship, bullied and scared away a Vietnamese supply ship near Subi Reef in the Spratly Islands.	(CSIS 2019)

		Harassment of Philippine fishing boats by Chinese vessels increased. In January, the Philippines claimed that a Chinese coast guard vessel intentionally rammed the Philippine fishing vessels near Scarborough Shoal. In April, Filipino fishermen claimed that their vessels were boarded by officers from three Chinese coast guard ships, who threatened the fishermen at gunpoint, stole the catch, and destroyed the equipment near Scarborough Shoal. Also, in April, the Chinese coast guard fired water cannons at Philippine fishing vessels near Scarborough Shoal.	(CSIS 2019)
		In October, Malaysian fishermen were threatened and “chased” from Luconia Shoals by Chinese Navy vessels	(<i>The Borneo Post</i> 2015)
2016	5	From January to April, HYSY 981 Oil rig was deployed twice to the overlapping area between two continental shelves of Vietnam and Hainan Island, China, which has not been delimited.	(Ives 2016; VNMOFA 2016)
		In February/March, China deployed a system of advanced surface-to-air missiles, the HQ-9 air defence system, and fighter jets to Woody Island in the Paracels.	(<i>Guancha</i> 2016; C. H. Wong and Lubold 2016; Heath 2016) (more on Chapter Nine)
		On 5 February, five Chinese vessels, including two naval and three coast guard ships harassed a Philippine naval supply ship near Half Moon Shoal in the Spratly Islands. The maneuvering began near midnight on 5 February and lasted through the dawn hours.	(CSIS 2019)
		Filipino fishing vessels were continuously harassed by Chinese vessels. From 28 February to 2 March, the Chinese coast guard prevented Philippine fishing boats from entering Jackson Atoll in the Spratly Islands. On 5–6 March, the Chinese coast guard rammed the Philippines' fishing boats in order to deny access to Scarborough Shoal. On 14 March, Filipino fishermen were harassed by a Chinese coast guard vessel and were denied to access to Scarborough Shoal. On 22 March, the Philippine fishermen claimed that Chinese officers threw bottles and rammed a fishing vessel with a coast guard ship near Scarborough Shoal.	(CSIS 2019)
		From March to October, in three incidents, China coast guard ships engaged in harassment and ramming of Vietnamese fishing vessels. In March, a Chinese coast guard ship boarded the Vietnamese fishing vessel, seized the catch and destroyed equipment near the Paracel Islands. In July, two Chinese coast guard ships rammed and sank Vietnamese fishing vessels near Paracel Islands. In October, a Chinese coast guard vessel repeatedly rammed a Vietnamese fishing boat in the Paracel Islands.	(CSIS 2019)
2017	3	On 18 June, Chinese coast guard officers boarded a Vietnamese fishing boat, released the catch, and destroyed the vessel's equipment near the Paracel Islands.	(CSIS 2019)
		In July, a Spanish oil company was ordered by the Vietnamese government to halt its development drilling. That decision was reportedly taken after China threatened to attack Vietnamese bases in the Spratly Islands	(Hayton 2017a; 2017b)

		China built a network of airbases, radar towers and missile defence systems in its outposts in the Spratlys. In December, it reported that China has continued to deploy high-frequency radar and other equipment that could be used for military purposes on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea.	(AMTI 2017f)
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Appendix C: Oil and natural gas deposits in the South China Sea



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (U.S. EIA), "Contested areas of South China Sea likely have few conventional oil and gas resources", at: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=10651> (accessed on 11 August 2017)

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Zusammenfassung

Im letzten Jahrzehnt hat China mehr und mehr eine maritime Diplomatie des Zwangs eingesetzt, um seine Ziele in den maritimen Disputen im Südchinesischen Meer zu erreichen. Durch den Einsatz von Marinestreitkräften, insbesondere von paramilitärischen Kräften, hat China nach und nach den Status Quo im Südchinesischen Meer zu seinen Gunsten verändert. Trotz seiner überlegenen Macht hat China jedoch nicht alle seine politischen Ziele erreicht, kleine südostasiatische Anspruchssteller dazu zu bringen, seinen Forderungen zu entsprechen.

Diese Dissertation untersucht die Verwendung der maritimen Diplomatie des Zwangs durch China im Südchinesischen Meer seit 2011. Sie erforscht bedeutende kontextuelle und taktische Faktoren, die das Ergebnis von Chinas Verwendung dieser Diplomatie beeinflussen, in einer vergleichenden Fallstudie, die folgende Ereignisse umfasst: die Vorfälle der zerschnittenen Kabel im Jahr 2011, das Scharmützel am Scarborough-Riff im Jahr 2012, die Spannungen um das Second Thomas Shoal in den Jahren 2013-2014, die *Haiyang Shiyou* 981 Ölplattform-Krise im Jahr 2014, die Landgewinnung auf den Spratly-Inseln in den Jahren 2013-2015 und die Militarisierung im Südchinesischen Meer seit 2016.

Diese Studie demonstriert, dass die Verschiebung im regionalen Gleichgewicht der Mächte und die Zunahme an materiellen Möglichkeiten, vor allen Dingen an maritimen Gesetzesvollzugskräften, günstige übergreifende Rahmenbedingungen für die Verwendung der maritimen Diplomatie des Zwangs durch China im Südchinesischen Meer seit 2011 erschaffen haben. Durch die Analyse von fünf Faktoren (Asymmetrie der Macht, Asymmetrie der Motivation, Stärke der US-amerikanischen Abschreckung, der innenpolitische Faktor und die Klarheit der Compliance-Begriffe) belegt diese Dissertation, dass die Kombination der Asymmetrie der Motivation zugunsten kleiner Zielländer und starker Abschreckungssignale von Seiten der USA Chinas effektive Verwendung der maritimen Diplomatie des Zwangs einschränkt. Wenn die Reaktion und Abschreckungsmaßnahmen der USA jedoch langsam und schwach erfolgen, hat China seine erzwingenden Anstrengungen erfolgreich in Form von faits accomplis umgesetzt, indem es sich auf seine schnell wachsende materielle Kraft und militärischen Fähigkeiten gestützt hat. Die innenpolitischen Faktoren der öffentlichen Meinung und des bürokratischen Pluralismus hatten einen begrenzten Effekt auf die Implementierung und das Ergebnis der chinesischen maritimen Diplomatie des Zwangs wie auch auf die Politik der südostasiatischen Rivalen um den Anspruch während der Krise. Schließlich schränken Chinas unklare Compliance-Begriffe und Vergleichsbedingungen die Möglichkeiten für ein produktives Verhandeln mit seinen Rivalen ein.