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The Intervention of Foreign Forces in The South China Sea and Its Counter Measures

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Abstract

Key words:

South China Sea dispute, Sovereignty disputes, Peaceful consultation, Adjusting strategy

The South China Sea dispute is a complex issue involving China, the Philippines, and Southeast Asian countries. It primarily revolves around the question of sovereignty in the Nansha Islands. Addressing the complex matters in this region requires the use of peaceful dialogue and consultation as the main approach. Adopting principles of openness, transparency, inclusivity, and fostering trust and cooperation are essential. This article presents a thorough analysis of China, discussing three strategies: adapting ocean strategies, avoiding military conflicts, and using appropriate power as guidance in the current situation.

Introduction

The South China Sea Island dispute has garnered considerable scholarly interest, leading to numerous interpretations of China's changing regional policy dynamics (De Castro, 2015). A prevailing viewpoint highlights China's increasing assertiveness in recent years, which is attributed to its significant economic and military growth as well as the rising tide of nationalism within the nation (Chung, 2023). It is important to mention that a different perspective has become prominent, as put forth by the expert in China studies, Lu Bobin. Lu argues that China's increased strength can be better comprehended in a challenging domestic economic climate (Kim, 2015).

Contrary to this perspective, Chinese scholars (Chubb, 2020) often support a narrative that emphasises China's cautious approach. Ji Rengui (Ji, 2017) provides a detailed analysis of the interactions and cognitive dimensions between nations, utilising the process perspective in international relations research (Zhang, 2017). This perspective highlights China's preference for peaceful negotiations as the primary method of resolving disputes with Southeast Asian countries, specifically Vietnam. Scholar SuXuefeng also supports this perspective, arguing that China has implemented a dedicated policy to resolve the South China Sea dispute. This approach involves actively engaging in security cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Relying on this research domain, it is evident that the academic community has presented a wide range of interpretations regarding China's policies. These interpretations cover different strategies, such as the regional security system modelled after ASEAN and bilateral negotiations. Both China and Vietnam are widely acknowledged to be significantly influenced by external powers in shaping their stances.

A significant issue persists current research lacks a thorough analysis firmly grounded in established theories of international relations. This article aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on international diplomacy, focusing on customs and negotiations, in a concise and academic manner.

Multi-Dimensional considerations of foreign forces involved in issue

Logical considerations based on the geographical importance.

Geographical location: The South China Sea is situated at the intersection of the Pacific, Indian Ocean, Asia, and Oceania, serving as a crucial link

between various important straits (Li, 2016). The International Trade Hub: The South China Sea is of great importance in ensuring the energy supplies and economic prosperity of major powers.

Abundant Energy and Resources: Comparisons have been made between the substantial oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea and those in the Persian Gulf. These reserves make up approximately 12% of the world's total reserves (Hu, 2021). In addition, recent discoveries of energy sources like combustible ice beneath the seabed have revealed significant resource potential (Chang, 2018). The region is home to a diverse range of marine life and contains valuable metal minerals that have the potential for development. This has caught the attention of various nations, including the US, due to the promising prospects it offers for China's economic growth (Zhang, 2019).

Table 1- Overview of countries

State	Geographical features	Population	Area (km ²)
China	Located in East Asia and the northeast of South China Sea	1,409,517,397	9,596,961
Philippines	It consists of 7,641 islands in the western Pacific Ocean	113,061,232	300,000
Vietnam	Southeast Asian country bordering on South China Sea	97,338,579	331,210
Malaysia	Southeast Asian country bordering South China Sea	32,776,194	330,803
Indonesia	Largest archipelagic country in the world, with part of South China Sea located in	276,361,783	1,904,569

Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the countries in the South China Sea region. The strong appeal of vested interests has led to a significant convergence of interests and demands between the US and other concerned parties. The convergence of interests has led to the complex nature of the South China Sea issue (Garcia, 2019). Figure 1, in contrast, illustrates the developmental trajectory of the South China Sea issue, providing a visual depiction of its historical evolution (Teixeira, 2019).

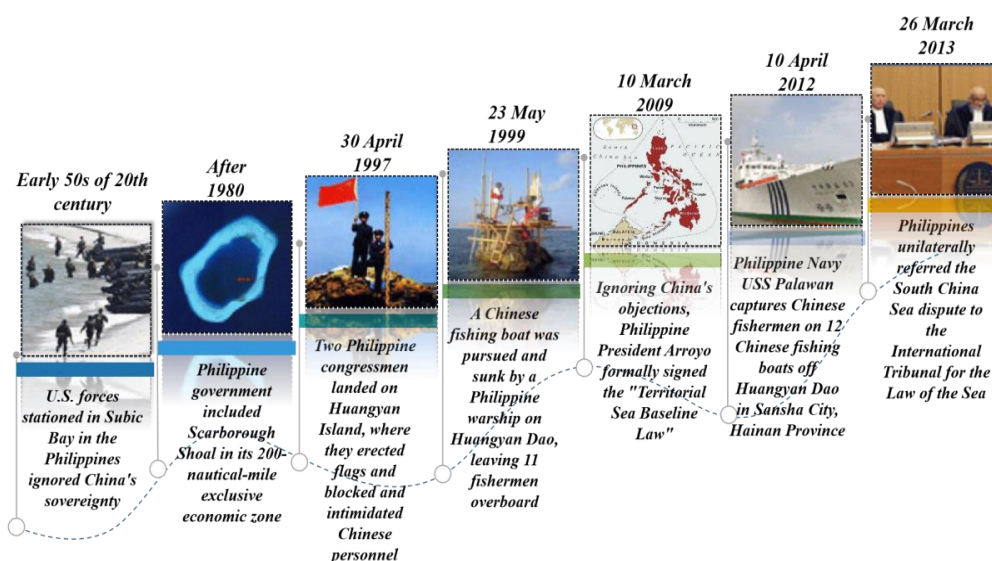


Figure 1-Development History Map

Cultural considerations based on the confrontation between Eastern and Western civilizations.

Clash of Civilizations Theory provides a new outlook on global organisation. The rivalry for cultural influence between nations is growing stronger. Modernization should not be mistaken for Westernisation, and globalisation does not disregard localization, let alone Americanization (Wirth & Schatz, 2020). A well-respected academic, Huntington introduced the *theory of clashes of civilizations*, highlighting the significance of political economy and ideology as the main drivers of conflicts of interest. Simultaneously, conflicts arise from cultural disparities that stem from underlying values. Huntington argues that it is more significant to classify countries and groups based on civilization rather than political, economic systems, or development levels (Yiallourides, 2019). Thus, it can be argued that the future of global politics will be predominantly characterised by divisions based on civilizations. According to Zhang (2020), cultural differences have become the main cause of conflict in the modern world. Future conflicts are expected to mainly arise along the borders where these eight major civilizations meet, comprising humanity. The convergence of Confucian and Islamic civilizations presents a substantial challenge to Western civilization, particularly led by the US (Teixeira, 2018).

Table 2- Overview of cultural and geopolitical considerations

Aspect of Culture	Chinese Culture	Western Culture
Historical View	Emphasizes historical continuity, territorial integrity	Prioritizes international law and self-determination
Diplomatic Style	Maintains stability, avoids military expansion	Tends to deploy military forces
Sovereignty View	Emphasizes territorial integrity and sovereignty rights	Prioritizes personal freedom and self-determination
International Institutions	Engages in multilateral cooperation and international organizations	Favors bilateral mechanisms and military alliances
Social Values	Values family and social stability	Values individual rights and social diversity
Educational System	Emphasizes discipline and collective learning	Emphasizes innovation and individual development
Government Role	Emphasizes social stability and authority	Emphasizes citizen rights and limited government
Group Perspective	Values collective responsibility and belonging	Emphasizes individual independence and competition

Table 2 provides valuable information on the cultural and geopolitical aspects. Immigration and maritime traditions have influenced American culture, while Chinese culture is more rooted in continental influences. The maritime culture embraces diversity, while the mainland culture tends to be more insular. The development of Chinese civilization is intricately linked to the natural landscapes and agrarian lifestyles that prevailed before the industrial era. On the other hand, the maritime culture in America has been instrumental in solidifying America's position of global superiority.

Hegel's Philosophy of History observed that China, despite its geographical proximity to the sea and early engagement in maritime exploration, did not fully adopt oceanic civilization, resulting in a limited impact on Chinese culture.

China's reform and opening made the emergence of its land-sea hybrid civilization possible. China's transition away from its agricultural roots has not completely eradicated the lingering remnants of its inward agricultural mindset. China has focused on land sovereignty, neglecting maritime sovereignty. Even in the present day, when inquired about the land area of China, numerous Chinese individuals tend to mention 9.6 million square kilometres, overlooking the additional 3 million square kilometres of maritime territory. China's historical focus on land rather than sea has led to a lack of attention and increased complexity. [Figure 2](#) depicts four key elements: territorial security, energy security, economic and military concerns, and maritime interests.



Figure 2- Four aspects involved in South China Sea issue.

Historical considerations based on the remains of the East-West Cold War mentality.

Realist scholars have traditionally focused on material factors, particularly military and economic aspects, when analysing foreign policy. Despite Vietnam's ongoing efforts to enhance its military capabilities, including the acquisition of warships from Russia, there remains a notable disparity in both the quality and quantity of equipment compared to the Chinese navy ([Pradhan & Mohapatra, 2021](#)).

During the early period of China's history, Vietnam took advantage of China's limited naval control and proximity to occupy numerous islands and reefs. In November 2013, the Liaoning aircraft carrier commenced its voyage, serving as a deterrent to nations involved in the South China Sea dispute, including Vietnam. The reduced distance between Sansha City and the disputed islands has effectively addressed the issue of distance in the implementation of China's policy. Vietnam faces considerable challenges in swiftly occupying and managing disputed islands with military force and administrative measure. Given its strategic location near the mainland of Vietnam, Sansha City serves as a deterrent against activities like Vietnamese occupation of islands, construction of reef facilities, and dispatch of ships for patrols. In 2010, China was compelled to engage in proactive diplomacy with Vietnam, further complicating the situation.

Hegemonic power Behavior under long-Term consideration

Based on the long-term consideration of hegemonic countries to contain rising countries

The interaction between emerging powers and dominant hegemons plays a crucial role on a global scale in today's geopolitical environment (Ningbo, 2016). The United States not only holds the status of being the most powerful developed nation globally, but it also maintains the distinct position of global hegemony (Ji, 2015). China, on the other hand, is recognised as the largest developing country globally, and its rise is widely accepted as an indisputable fact (Zhang, 2022), often hailed as the most significant historical advancement since the beginning of the 21st century (Midford, 2015). China's relationship with the international community has generally been peaceful and cooperative, but the US harbours undisclosed concerns. The United States sees China's advancement in maritime capabilities as a potential threat to its dominant position, aiming to hinder China's expansion into the ocean and confine it to the mainland (Thuy & Welfield, 2019).

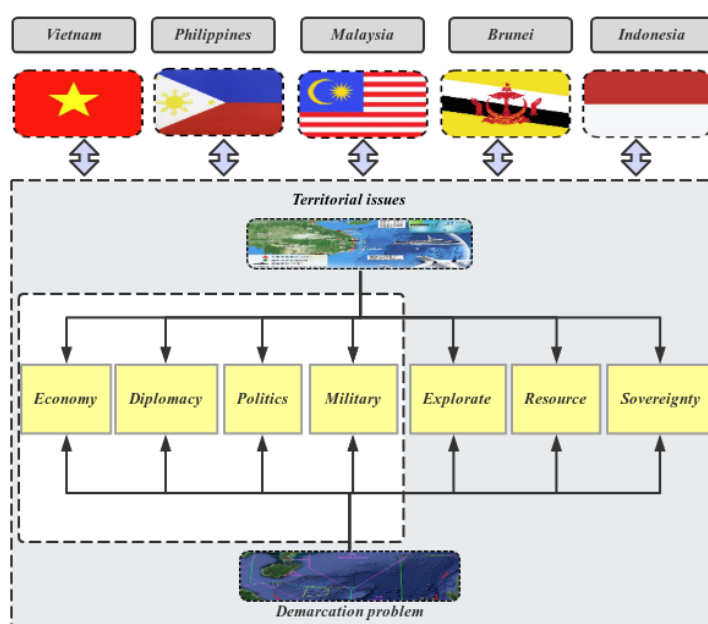


Figure 3- Sovereignty disputes in South China Sea

Figure 3 shows countries and issues involved in South China Sea sovereignty dispute. The US has reiterated the *China threat theory*, which is essentially the *China being threatened theory* or the *threat to China theory*.

Based on the realistic considerations of the general election of US leaders

Following the election of a head of government, it is common to observe a period of political instability in the domestic landscape (Hastey & Romaniuk, 2021; Raditio et al., 2019; Sutter & Huang, 2020). Table 3 displays the correlation between the South China Sea issue and the US leadership election. The US presidential election has transitioned from a

party-centred approach to a candidate-centred one, despite being a relatively stable procedural election.

Table 3- Consideration of relationship between South China Sea issue and election of US leaders

Aspect	Connection with the general election of American leaders	Characteristic
Policy continuity	Different parties or presidents may take different policy positions	Different Presidents May Emphasize Different South China Sea Policies
Alliances and alliances	Leaders may reassess U.S. relations with allies	American allies such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Japan may expect American support
International agreements and laws	US leaders may reassess the application of international laws and agreements to disputes in South China Sea	Whether the US ratifies agreements such as the International Convention on the Law of the Sea could influence its position on South China Sea issue
Economic cooperation	US leaders may focus on economic cooperation with China	Economic cooperation and trade policies may receive special attention in the context of South China Sea issue
Military presence	US military presence and joint military exercises may be concerned	US military activities may cause concern in South China Sea

Engaging in the game of Chinese cards can have a significant impact on shaping public opinion. Since 2000, the China topic has become a significant focus in the US election. The US is likely to raise issues for debate (Dafoe et al., 2022). In the 2012 general election, presidential candidates engaged in fierce competition, showcasing their abilities, and frequently discussing the South China Sea issue. President Obama's chances of being re-elected are challenged by a high unemployment rate of over 8%. To shift voters' focus, it is important to adopt a diplomatic approach, position ourselves as a leader in the Pacific region, make a prominent visit to Southeast Asia, and redirect any blame towards China. However, the candidate's cautious stance is 'not bringing China too close, nor daring to push China too far.' According to American media, the votes of Asian American voters could potentially have a significant impact on the outcome of the 2012 US election. However, there are concerns regarding the influence of Chinese American votes, leading to a cautious approach in both domestic and foreign affairs. Agency France Presse commented: "Historical experience tells us that the clamour of voices will come down the next year."

Construction of South Island Reefs and Militarization

Coastal states have the right to reclaim land from the sea within their sovereignty, and several countries, including the US, Japan, and the Netherlands, are actively involved in this practice. China's island and reef construction aims to enhance the living and working conditions of personnel stationed on the island. It also serves to fulfil China's international responsibilities and obligations in areas such as maritime search and rescue, disaster prevention, marine research, meteorological

observation, ecological environment protection, navigation safety, and fishery production services, etc. Advocates argue that the proposed action will not disrupt the peace and stability of the region.

Furthermore, proponents argue that the proposed action will provide superior and effective public service products for the South China Sea region (Yu & Wu, 2022). Table 4 displays China's construction activities on islands in the South China Sea. China's deployment of territorial defence facilities on the Nansha Islands is in accordance with international law, which grants sovereign countries the right to self-protection based on their security environment. The measures in question align with the established practices followed by all nations, in accordance with international law, and are unrelated to any form of militarization. Table 4 displays the development of islands and reefs in the South China Sea by China.

Table 4- China's construction in the South Island Reef

Reef Name	Construction Content	Construction Area (km ²)	Construction Time	Construction Purpose
Meiji Reef	Military facilities, ocean research center, eco-tourism, etc.	5.6	2015 to present	Strengthen territorial claims, promote research, and tourism development
Yong shu Reef	Military facilities, materials distribution center, ocean observation station, etc.	2.8	2013 to present	Support military strategy, supply operations, and ocean research
Zhubi Reef	Military facilities, airport, port, etc.	2.6	2014 to present	Enhance military capabilities, improve maritime logistics, and facilities
South China Sea Islands	Military bases, ports, airports, communication facilities, housing, etc.	Vast area, including multiple reefs	2013 to present	Strengthen territorial claims and expand naval presence
Subi Reef	Military facilities, ocean observation station, fishing harbor, etc.	1.2	2014 to present	Support military strategy and promote ocean resource development
Mischief Reef	Military facilities, aquaculture, port, etc.	1.3	2013 to present	Enhance maritime military capabilities and develop fisheries resources

Several nations, including the Philippines and Vietnam, have taken control of various islands and reefs. For an extended period, they persisted in executing expansion initiatives and deploying military equipment on the islands and reefs. As an illustration, Vietnam currently maintains a significant military presence on various islands and reefs, with a deployment of over 2000 troops. Vietnam's forces possess a diverse array

of weaponry, including missiles, tanks, and armed helicopters. Over the past few years, Vietnam has made significant improvements to its defence infrastructure on nine islands and reefs.

Additionally, the country has been actively involved in airport expansion initiatives and has strategically positioned missile launchers and long-range rockets on five islands and reefs. The United States views China as its main strategic competitor and has been consistently increasing its military presence in the South China Sea. This includes frequent deployments of military ships and aircraft to demonstrate its strength, as well as conducting targeted joint military exercises. The US also supports the upgrading of regional armaments and has been involved in provocations near the islands and reefs in China's Nansha Islands.

During the first half of 2021, the United States carried out a significant number of sea and air reconnaissance visits to China, along with more than 20 extensive naval exercises specifically focused on China. The US military has frequently conducted live-fire artillery exercises on the main waterway near China, often without providing navigation warnings. The US military has repeatedly warned Chinese ships sailing around potential threats. It is evident that the United States is a significant contributor to militarization and poses a substantial threat to peace and stability.

Counter measures and analysis of disputes in south China Sea

Adjust and formulate a new ocean strategy.

In the past, China has primarily focused on its land power status. However, due to historical events such as the conflict between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, as well as the Cultural Revolution, there has been a lack of recognition regarding the significance of maritime rights and interests. [Table 5](#) provides a comprehensive summary of the recently implemented marine strategy. In 1947, China declared the establishment of the eleven-dash line as the boundary of its sovereign rights and interests, making this announcement to the international community.

However, the international community did not express any opposition to it ([Ji, 2017](#)). In 1953, New China constructed radar stations in Vietnam by removing two sections of islands and reefs, resulting in the formation of nine-dash lines. China controls a total of nine Spratly Islands, with eight under mainland control and one under Taiwan's control. Meanwhile, several countries, including Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia, currently occupy up to 45 of these areas. The two conflicts between China and Vietnam in 1974 and 1988 were instrumental in protecting China's rights and interests in the South China Sea. However, the "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea has not effectively been enforced.

Table 5- Overview of the new marine strategy

New Maritime Strategy	Main Content	Objectives
Firmly Safeguard National Sovereignty	Maintain effective control over the South China Sea islands	Preserve national territorial integrity and security interests
Promote Dialogue with ASEAN Countries	Accelerate the negotiation of the <i>Code of Conduct in the South China Sea</i>	Provide a more robust institutional framework for dispute management and cooperation
Build the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”	Cooperate with countries along the route in infrastructure development and other areas	Enhance mutual trust and friendship among regional nations
Protect the Marine Ecological Environment	Take measures to reduce marine pollution and preserve ecological balance	Sustainably develop the marine environment
Promote Maritime Economic Cooperation	Expand the maritime industry and facilitate cross-border economic cooperation	Achieve economic win-win outcomes and enhance international competitiveness
Strengthen Marine Research and Technology Cooperation	Support marine scientific research and drive technological innovation	Elevate national marine technology levels and promote sustainable development

“Sovereignty lies with me, disputes are put aside, and joint development” is the concrete embodiment of “keeping a low profile and keeping a low profile,” which can be understood as a vague marine strategy. The purpose of this statement is to ensure that China's policy choices remain flexible, allowing for the potential resolution of the South China Sea issue under more favourable circumstances in the future. However, nowadays, South China Sea has formed a passive situation of “our side shelves development, while other sides compete for development.” From the coastal defensive “yellow water” navy to the offshore cruising “green water” navy to the ocean-going combat capability “blue water” navy, the Chinese navy has gone through 60 years, and the Chinese navy has gradually implemented the strategy of “moving towards deep blue.”

China established Sansha City to protect its territorial sovereignty and maritime borders. Additionally, there is a growing global trend towards enhancing naval capabilities and developing aircraft carrier fleets. Regarding the South China Sea issue, it is important to recognise that all nations have equal rights and obligations under international law. China asserts its sovereignty over the South China Sea, which entails assuming greater international obligations to ensure the security of the waterway. [Figure 4](#) presents an investigation into the countermeasures to disputes in the South China Sea. The study examines five different aspects and involves participants from junior high, senior high, junior college, and university.

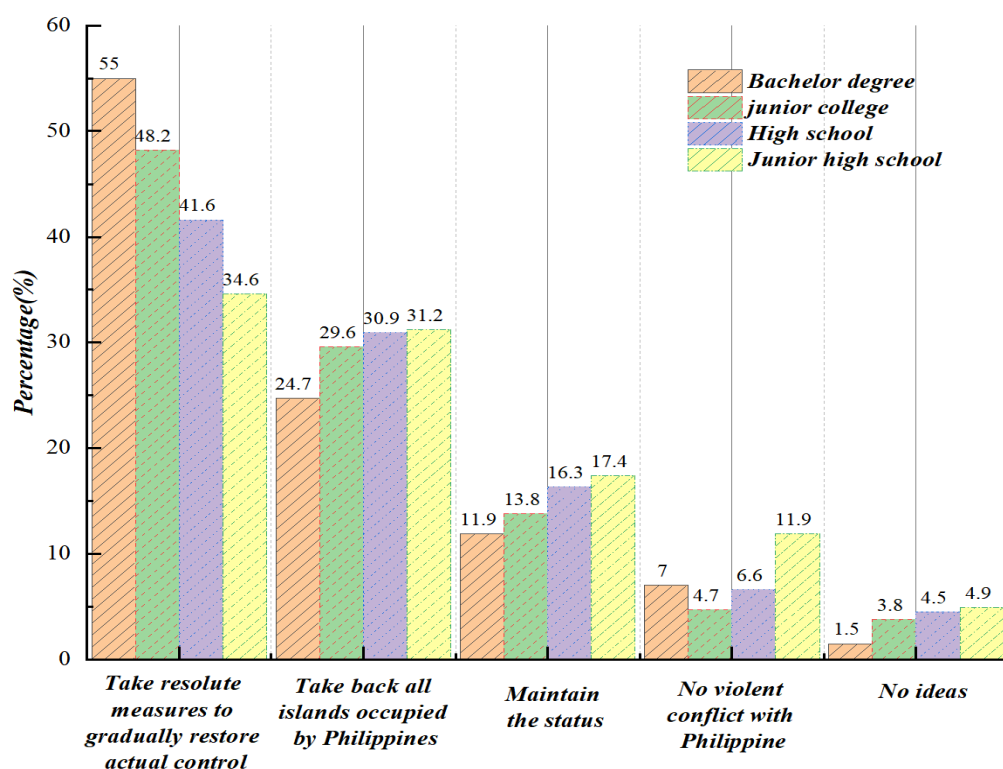


Figure 4- Investigation on the Countermeasures of South China Sea Dispute

Avoidance of direct military conflict

China's current naval strength remains noticeably below the global average (Gianoni, 2022). The Chinese Navy's limited ocean control and combat capabilities have led to inadequate security guarantees in the South China Sea. One reason is that the average tonnage of leading battleships is comparatively small. Currently, the Chinese Navy's leading battleships have an average tonnage of approximately 3000 tonnes. This is significantly lower than the United States' tonnage of 14000 metric tonnes, as well as less than Japan's 3700 metric tonnes and India's 3300 metric tonnes. In addition, there is a significant shortage of new battleships that possess satisfactory performance. When the displacement of the 052B missile destroyer exceeds 7500 metric tonnes, only two of them are deployed in the South China Sea Fleet.

Another issue to consider is the disparity in the proportion of combat ships to support ships. At present, the ratio of combat and support vessels in the United States stands at approximately 3 to 2. In Japan, the ratio is around 3 to 1, while in India, it is about 5 to 4. Nevertheless, the proportion within China's Navy is significantly inadequate, posing a substantial limitation on the extent and duration of maritime operations. Furthermore, the current constraints include the insufficient equipment performance of the primary combat vessels and the combat capability of the Air Force. Control over Nansha by the sea and air forces is limited, with a potential risk of being out of their jurisdiction. In recent years, Southeast Asian countries have been involved in the occupation and exploitation of China's South China Sea islands, reefs, and marine resources.

Table 6- Overview of Conflict Mitigation Policies and Measures in South China Sea

Policy measures	Details	Objectives
Diplomatic negotiations and consultations	Conduct bilateral negotiations	Settle disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests through dialogue
Dispute resolution mechanism	Encourage parties to disputes to settle disputes through arbitration	Settlement of territorial and maritime disputes through legal procedures
Humanitarian cooperation	Conduct humanitarian relief drills with neighbouring countries	Deal with common threats and improve emergency response capability.
Sustainable development support	Support fishery management and eco-environmental protection projects	Protect the ecological balance of South China Sea.

Table 6 presents a comprehensive summary of policies and measures aimed at mitigating conflicts. While it is undeniable that there is a considerable difference in naval capabilities between China and the US, it is important to note that the Chinese navy receives support from the mainland. As a result, the likelihood of a military conflict between the US and China in China's coastal waters is minimal. China is enhancing its naval capabilities to overcome the initial island barrier and advance towards the open sea beyond the second island chain. The United States should not underestimate China's growing strength. China's naval capabilities have been greatly bolstered by the addition of the aircraft carrier "Liaoning". While the US's influence in East Asia may be diminishing, it would be impractical to completely disregard its impact. Figure 5 illustrates four countermeasures pertaining to the South China Sea issue. Regarding the South China Sea issue, it is crucial to establish a suitable institutional framework that considers the specific interests and demands of the US while also safeguarding China's core interests.



Figure 5- Four countermeasures for South China Sea issue

Application of combined hard and soft power

Modern nations worldwide are no longer confined to aspects such as economy, military, and other forms of hard power when expressing their overall strength. The competition for soft power has taken over as the central focus of international competition, replacing ideological competition. To be proactive, it is important to explore the integration of both strong and subtle influence while also capitalising on China's adeptness in wielding power (McLaughlin, 2022).

Addressing the "discourse power dilemma" surrounding the South China Sea issue is of utmost importance. Improving communication within the global community has become a central concern in China's pursuit of peaceful development. China's path of peaceful development has faced numerous doubts, misunderstandings, criticisms, and malicious derogations from international public opinion, particularly led by the US. China faces a significant challenge in terms of its influence on global discussions regarding its peaceful development. The prevailing discourse system, largely influenced by Western perspectives, portrays China as politically assertive and aggressive in the South China Sea issue. These perceptions of China have become quite widespread in the international community. China feels frustrated because it believes it has been unfairly silenced and not heard.

In the face of the dominant influence of the US, China is actively working to shape international public opinion regarding its stance in the South China Sea. China aims to ensure a fair evaluation of its position in the international community. In March 2010, China put forward the concept of the "core interests' theory in the South China Sea." In August 2012, China made it clear that the focus of the South China Sea issue revolves around the disagreement regarding the ownership of the Nansha Islands and the delineation of the surrounding waters. Taiwan exercises control over Dongsha, while the Chinese governments of Xisha and Zhongsha do not acknowledge any sovereignty disputes. Huangyan Island is situated in the Zhongsha Islands. China maintains that there is no sovereignty dispute. China's focus is shifting from the "South China Sea issue" to the "Nansha issue," indicating a clearer stance in the South China Sea and the establishment of a power structure for the "Nansha issue."

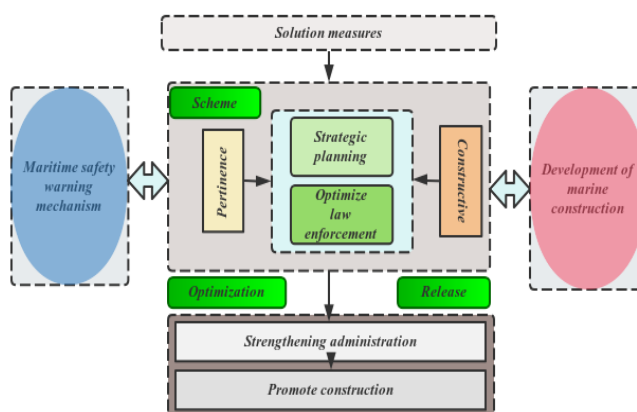


Figure 6- Countermeasure flow analysis

Utilize ingenious strength to seek a breakthrough in solving the issue. [Figure 6](#) presents an analysis of the process for addressing the South China Sea issue. China's commitment to upholding sovereignty over the South China Sea, deeply rooted in the core interests of the Chinese nation, should not be compromised. This principle is of utmost importance. It is important to approach no sovereign issues with reason, seeking advantages while exercising restraint. The intricate nature of the South China Sea issue has diminished the likelihood of a comprehensive resolution, and China's unwavering commitment to bilateral negotiations instead of multilateral talks has faced scrutiny. We should maximise the differences between Southeast Asian countries, consistently strive for positive relationships, foster mutual understanding, cooperation, and shared success, and "establish prestige" as role models. Due to the concerning actions of certain countries that are disregarding islands, reefs, and waters in the South China Sea, which is a direct violation of China's maritime sovereignty, China is prepared to take the necessary measures and utilise its strategic power to address the ongoing issue in the region.

Conclusion

The South China Sea dispute encompasses more than just questions of sovereignty. It encompasses a range of factors, including resource development, territorial expansion, and U.S. interests in Asia, making it a highly intricate political issue. China is confronted with a range of domestic and external challenges, such as those in Tibet, Taiwan, Xinjiang, the South China Sea, and Japan. The regional situation is becoming more and more challenging for China's pursuit of peaceful development. China has consistently expressed its position on the South China Sea, but it is crucial to go beyond mere diplomatic statements to showcase China's unwavering resolve and ability to safeguard its sovereignty.

China remains steadfast in its unwavering stance on the South China Sea. The pressing nature of the South China Sea issue necessitates appropriate adjustments to effectively address potential situations. Looking at it practically, putting aside disagreements hasn't decreased them, and collaborating on development hasn't fully met the expectations of neighbouring nations. The shift from initial exploration to overt occupation has greatly infringed upon China's sovereignty and integrity, endangering the safety and lawful rights of fishermen in the South China Sea.

Thus, it is imperative for the Chinese government to confront the undeniable truth of persistent conflicts. Cooperative development should be a guiding principle, ensuring the preservation of sovereignty and integrity in the South China Sea. In this context, it is crucial to prioritise strategic deterrence and preparedness for potential conflicts.

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