

Geopolitical Quandaries in the South China Sea: Options for the Philippines, China and the US

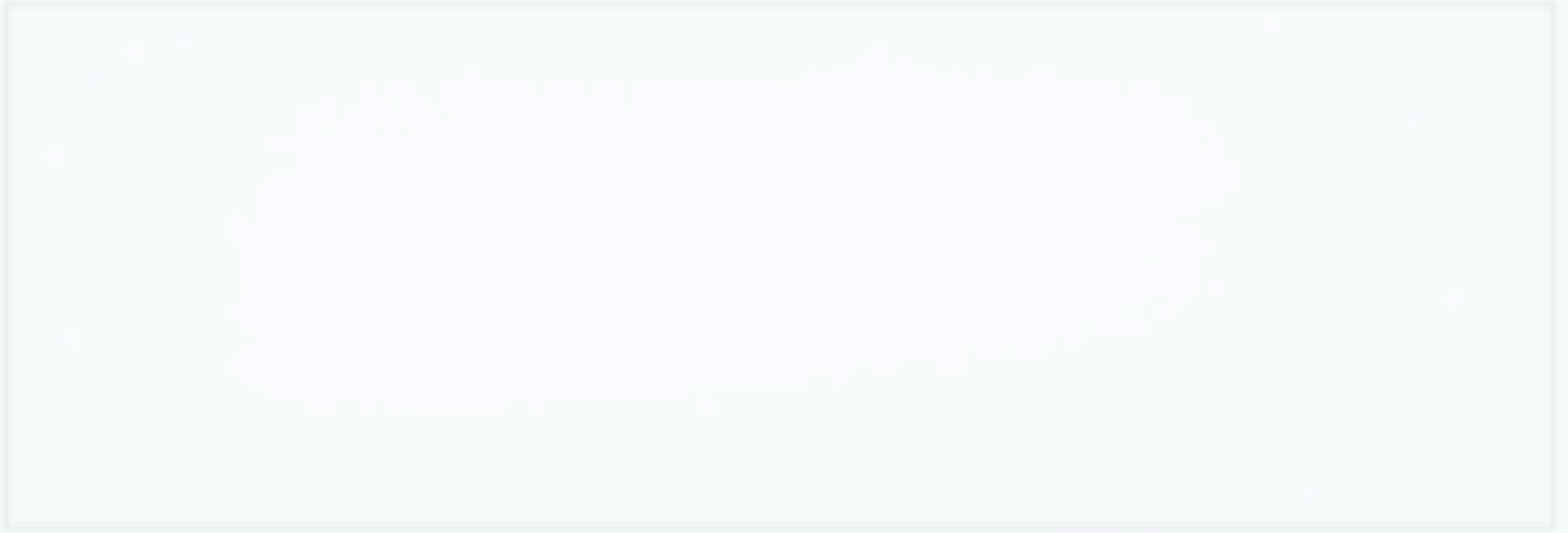
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- Geopolitics: effects of geography on international politics; a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state.
- Quandary: perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation
- Argument: Asserting maritime rights of the country is vital, upholding international law is appropriate. To do both successfully, however, Filipinos need to expand our understanding of the geopolitical context of the South China Sea dispute beyond a “West Philippine Sea mentality”

Key points

- The South China Sea is a complex security environment with several layers of intersecting challenges, of which rivalry between US and China may be the most challenging
- Chinese assertiveness and US rebalance are both driven by geopolitical interests:
 - ✓ U.S. primacy vs. China's demand for strategic space (Southeast Asia as China's strategic backyard)
 - ✓ strategic position relative to trade and energy/raw materials supply routes
 - ✓ Influence over the shaping of regional order and security architecture

- The U.S., China and the Philippines face quandaries in the management of relations and how to promote their respective interests
 - ✓ US: defending primacy with less resources; alliance credibility vs alliance entanglement; China being a 'frenemy'
 - ✓ China's: dissatisfied power but not ready to confront US; China dream amidst economic slowdown; regional policy is full of contradictions
 - ✓ PH: principlism vs pragmatism towards China, relying on an alliance whose credibility/legitimacy are doubted; claim on 'exclusive' resources that can only be jointly developed
- If rivalry of major powers is allowed to overlay other goals and concerns, it will complicate or even prevent solutions that the Philippines desires



South China Sea

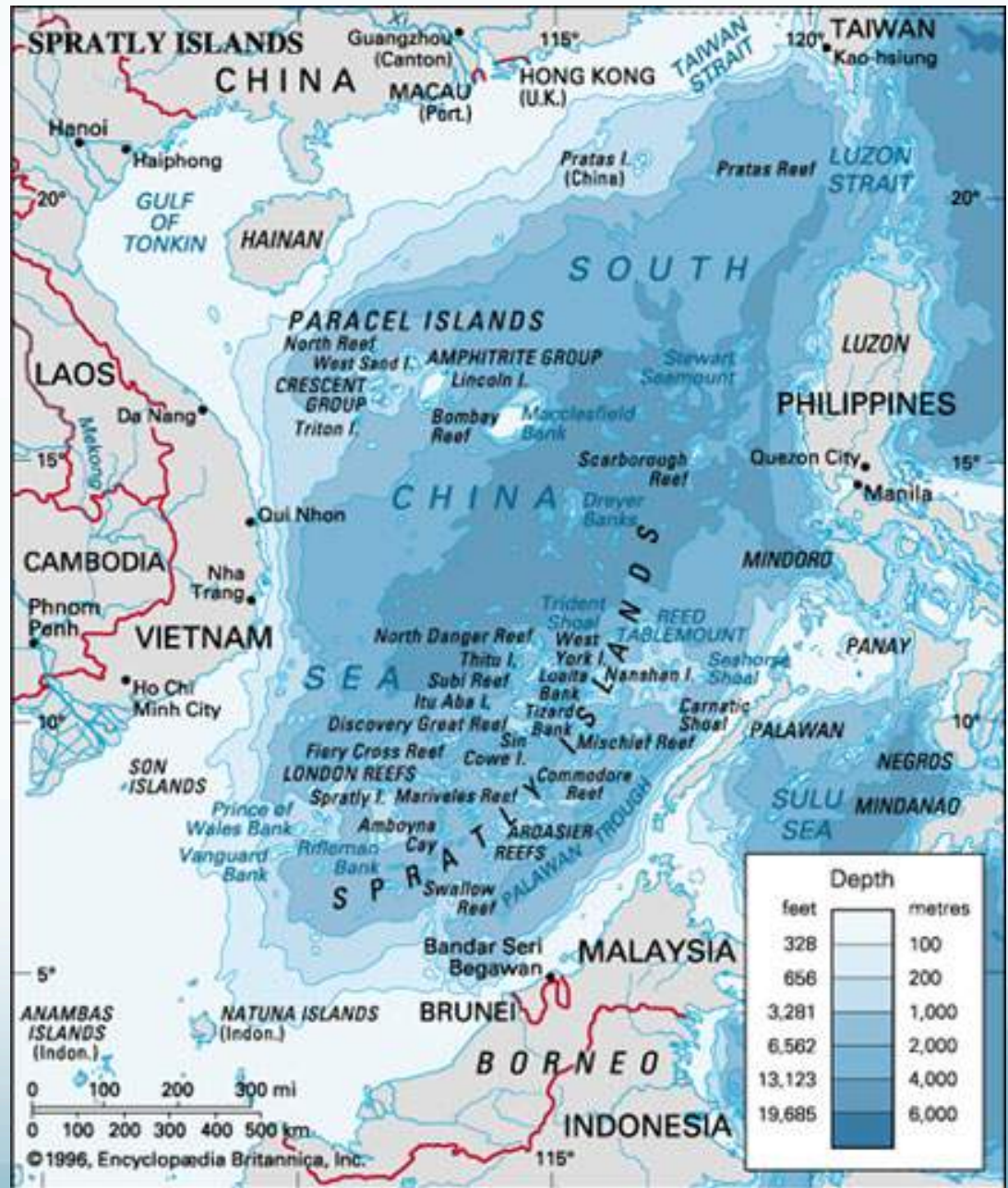
A complex security environment
with several layers of intersecting challenges

Territorial disputes

Overlapping maritime rights

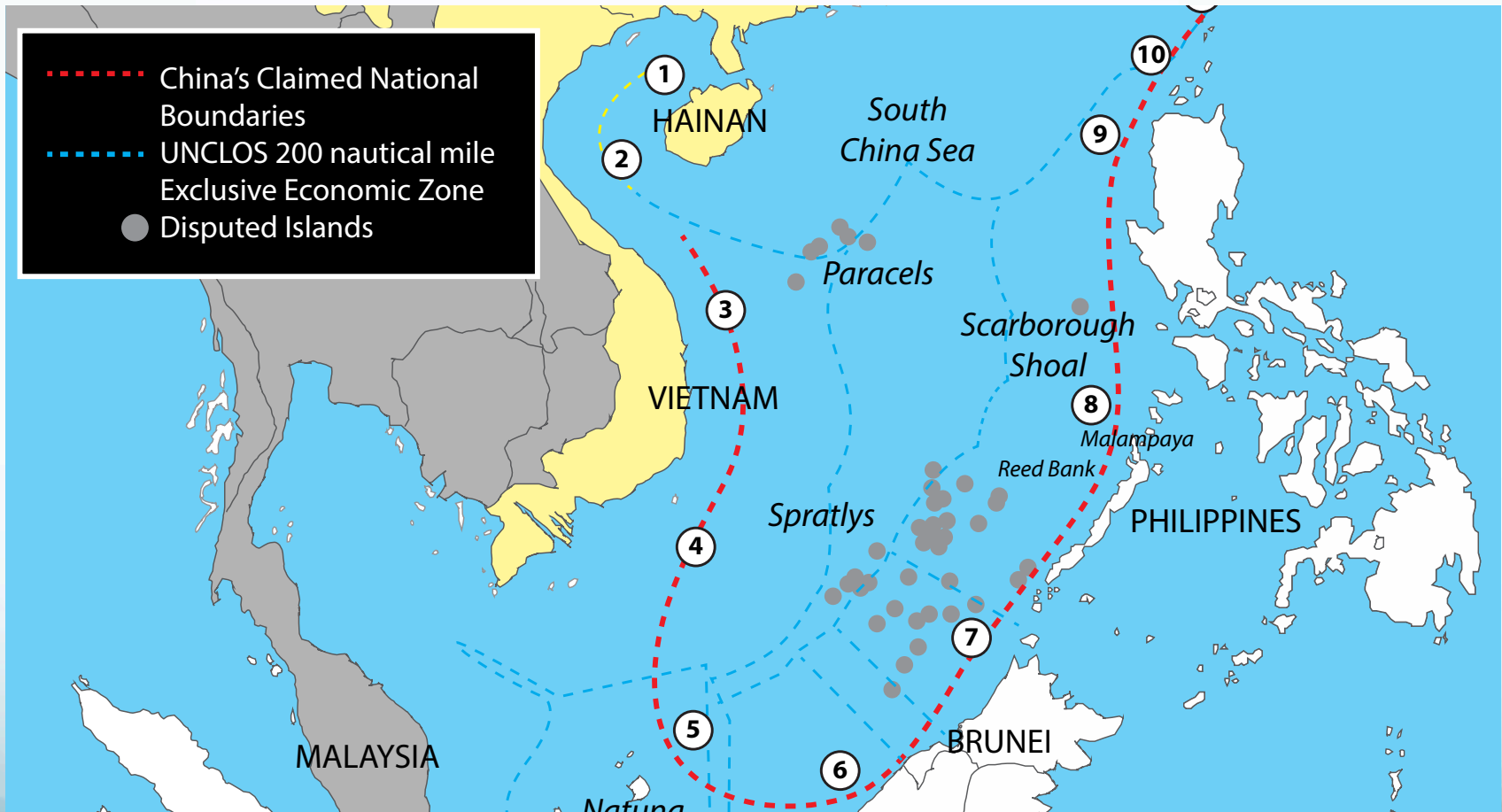
Common challenges
facing littoral states

Geopolitical competition
among major powers

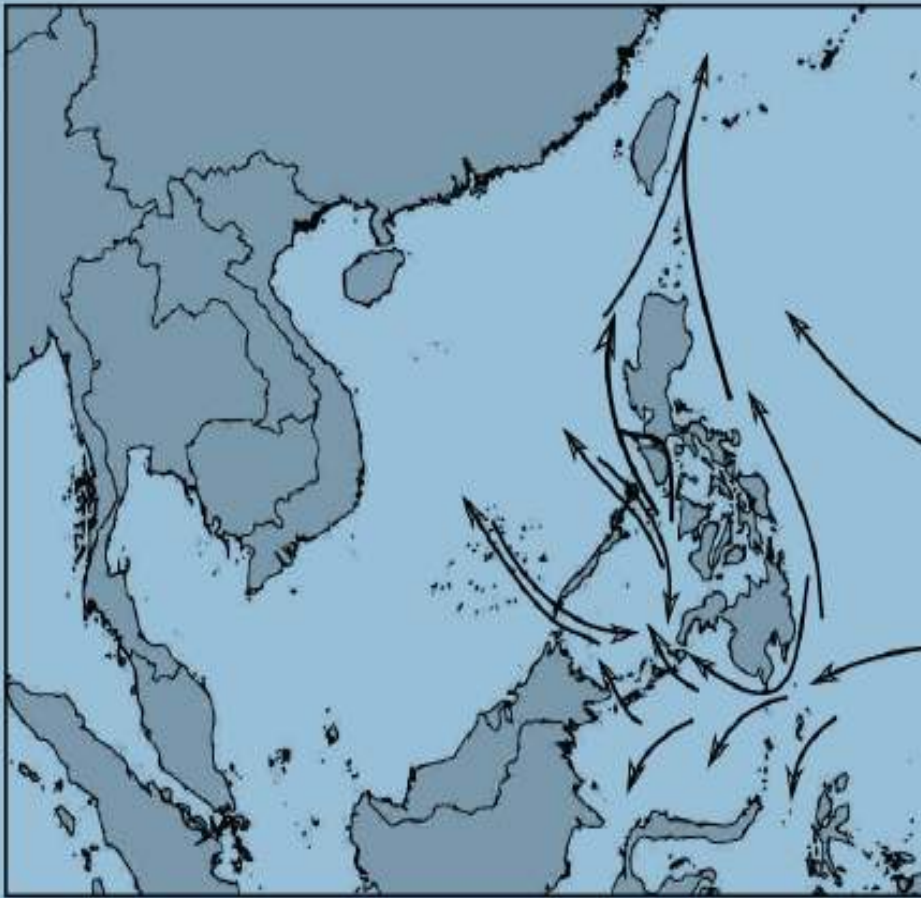


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Maritime disputes



Common security challenges

FIGURE 7
FIGURE 7

Migratory routes of some tuna species passing through the Philippines.
(Source: Morgan and Valencia, Atlas for Marine Policy in Southeast Asian Seas, 1983)

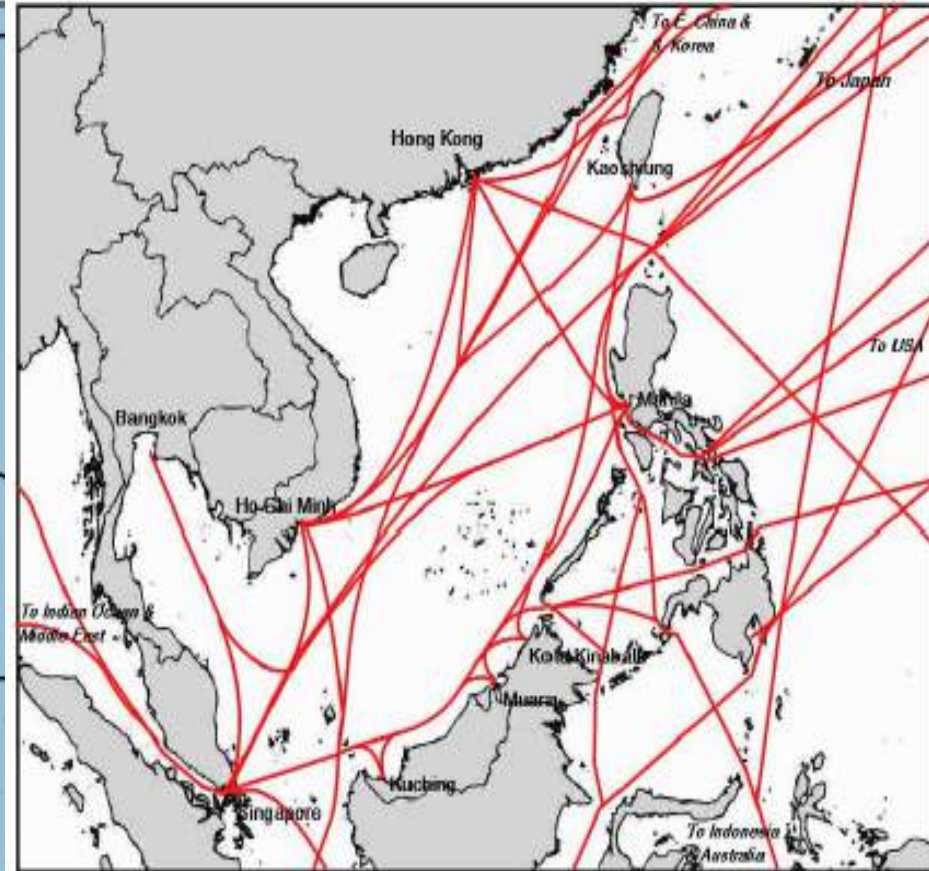
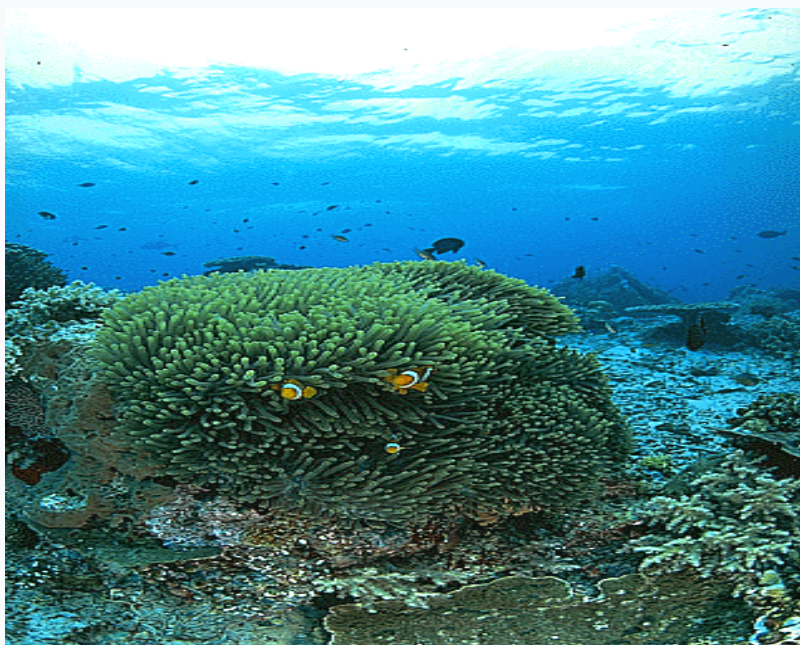
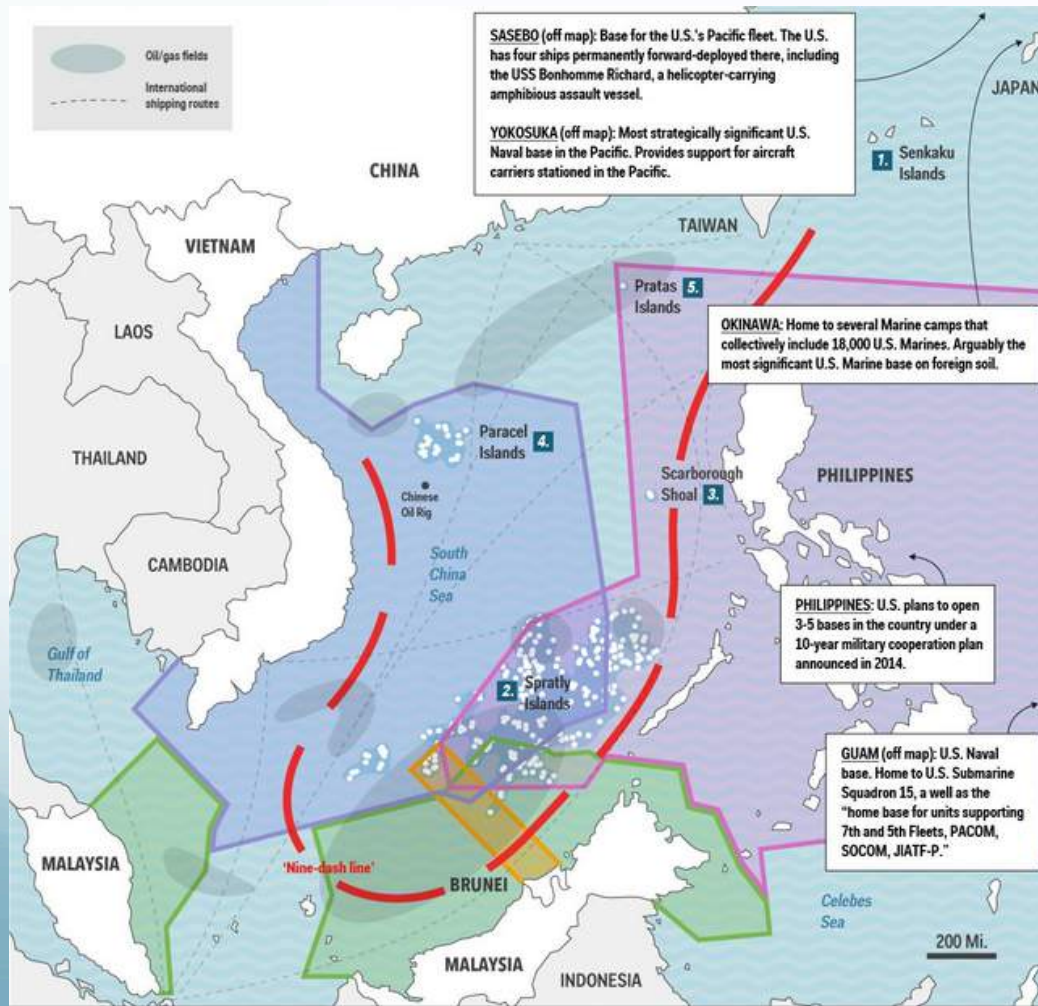


FIGURE 5

The "sea lines of communication" or SLOCs running through Southeast Asia and the South China Sea and West Philippine Sea. SLOCs link seas and ports within the regional and global maritime transportation network and are absolutely essential to international trade.



Geopolitical competition among major powers



Woody Island Overview, Feb. 17, 2016



U.S. Navy Destroyer Sails Near South China Sea Disputed Islands

"China strongly urges the U.S. side to ...immediately correct its mistake and not take any dangerous or provocative acts that threaten China's sovereignty and security interests,"

Obama:
"We will fly, sail or
operate wherever
International law
allows". –Feb 16,2016





China's assertiveness & U.S. rebalance

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?
Posturing or gearing up for conflict?

Chinese assertiveness

- 2007 warnings to British Petroleum and Exxon; China's State Council approved creation of Sansha City to administer the territorial claims;
- 2008 construction of a submarine base on Hainan Island; unilateral imposition of annual fishing bans
- 2009 formal submission of its nine-dash line claim in response to joint Vietnam–Malaysia ECS submission; tensions between the Indonesian Navy and Chinese fisheries administration vessels near Natuna Islands following the arrest of seventy-five Chinese fishermen
- 2010 the planting of the Chinese flag on the South China Sea seabed; US statement of “national interest” at ARF

- 2011 harrassment of oil research vessels of PH and Vietnam
- 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff
- 2013 PLA conducted activities close to Malaysia's James Shoal
- 2014 Xinhua's publication of a new "vertical" map ; reclamation activities begin; HYSY 981 incident in the Paracels
- 2015 building of airstrips

Perception of conflation of economic and security goals

CROUCHING TIGER, ROARING DRAGON

China has proposed several initiatives to secure international land and sea trading routes to emerge as a superpower



ROAD LINKS

➤ Land route, a reinvention of the silk route, **will pass through the Central Asian Republic and then on to Europe**

➤ China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an additional component, **will connect China to Gwadar in Pakistan, a deep water port operated by China**

➤ Corridor through Myanmar **will give access to Bay of Bengal**

➤ Sea segment **will connect South East Asia, South Asian ports, African countries and Europe**

➤ Called the Maritime Silk Route it aims at **linking Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh**

WHY IS CHINA DOING IT

➤ Initiative puts to **use China's surplus funds and capacity**

➤ Will **open up new markets** in different continents

➤ **Now China depends excessively on sea route via Singapore for trade**; ships vulnerable to disruption

➤ Gwadar opens an alternative sea route; so does Myanmar corridor. **Besides securing existing sea lines, these provide alternatives**



INDIAN OPPOSITION

➤ India is concerned that **CPEC passes through Pak-occupied Kashmir**, provides access to Arabian Sea

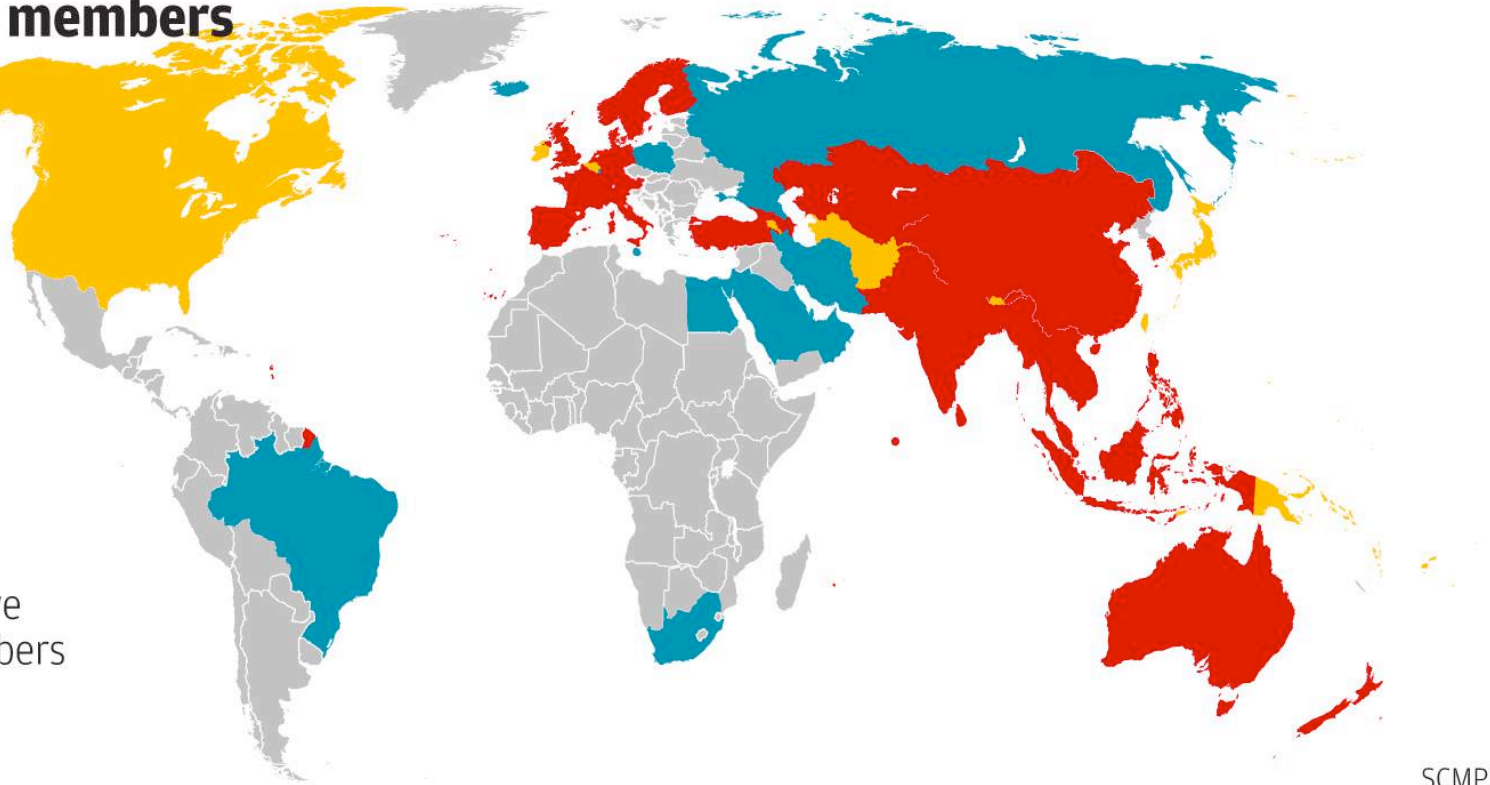
➤ **China protested when India engaged in offshore exploration with Vietnam**, arguing that the exploration planned was in contested EEZ areas

➤ Land route through Bangladesh, **Myanmar gives China leverage in Bay of Bengal in India's backyard**

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Card-carrying members

-  ADB members and AIIB prospective founding members
-  ADB members but not AIIB prospective founding members
-  AIIB prospective founding members but not ADB members



US pivot-rebalance



UNITED STATES PACIFIC COMMAND AT A GLANCE

360,000+

MILITARY & CIVILIAN
PERSONNEL



1,200+

SPECIAL OPERATIONS
PERSONNEL

SUBORDINATE COMPONENT COMMANDS

U.S. Pacific Fleet	U.S. Army Pacific	Marine Corps Forces, Pacific	U.S. Pacific Air Forces
140,000 PERSONNEL	106,000 PERSONNEL	86,000 PERSONNEL	29,000 PERSONNEL
600 AIRCRAFT	309 AIRCRAFT	640 AIRCRAFT	300+ AIRCRAFT
5 AIRCRAFT CARRIER STRIKE GROUPS	1 CORPS	2 EXPEDITIONARY FORCES	
200 SHIPS	2 DIVISIONS		

PACOM TOP FACTS

36 NATIONS

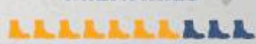
3,200
LANGUAGES

5 OF THE **7**
U.S. TREATY ALLIES

5
OF THE WORLD'S
DECLARED
NUCLEAR NATIONS

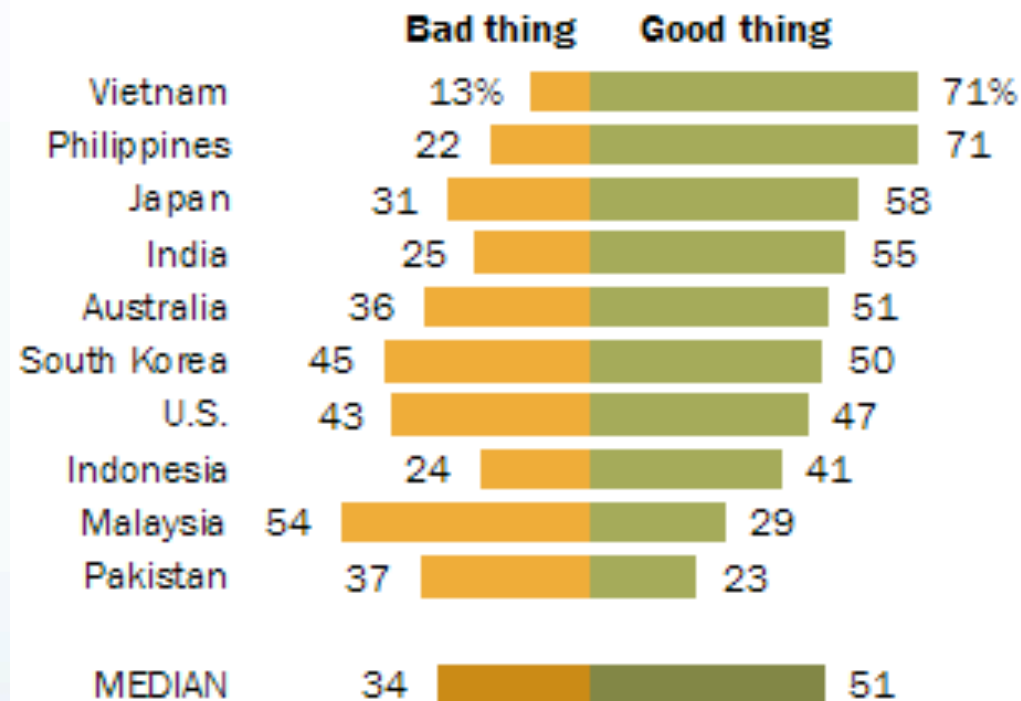


7
OF THE WORLD'S 10
LARGEST STANDING
MILITARIES



U.S. Military Presence in Asia Welcomed by Many

Increased U.S. military resources in Asia are a ...



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q37.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

WHAT IS THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP?

Partnership would include **12 countries** with almost **800 million consumers**

Combined GDP of **\$28.1 trillion**, **40% of the global GDP**

Most significant trade negotiation in a generation

Promises significant economic benefits for American businesses and workers



Worst-case scenario?


“My argument in a nutshell is that if China continues to grow economically, it will attempt to dominate Asia the way the United States dominates the Western Hemisphere. The United States, however, will go to enormous lengths to prevent China from achieving regional hegemony. Most of Beijing’s neighbors, including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam, will join with the United States to contain Chinese power. The result will be an intense security competition with considerable potential for war.”



– John Mearsheimer

SCS in a contest for spheres of influence

- U.S. primacy vs. China's demand for strategic space
 - ✓ Can US remain the preponderant power in East Asia?
 - ✓ Will China become a maritime power? Will ASEAN become China's strategic backyard or will it preserve strategic autonomy?

- 
- Trade and energy/raw materials supply routes
 - ✓ China's efforts to overcome its “Malacca dilemma”
 - ✓ One Belt-One Road

- Influence over the shaping of regional order and security architecture
 - ✓ Hegemony? Condominium or concert?
 - ✓ Multipolar balance
 - ✓ Alliances & cooperative security multilateralism

U.S.'s quandary

- ✓ US: defending primacy with less resources;
 - ✧ Economic malaise, political division
 - ✧ Will technological fixes save the day?
 - ✧ Will Chinese assertiveness save the day (as legitimation for US primacy)?
- ✓ alliance credibility vs alliance entanglement;
 - ✧ Why US supports PH in WPS
 - ✧ What US fears PH will do
- ✓ China being a 'frenemy'
 - ✧ Elements of cooperation and competition in bilateral relations
 - ✧ Will there be policy consistency, moving forward?
- ✓ US is not a signatory of UNCLOS

China's quandary

- ✓ dissatisfied power but not ready to confront US;
 - ✧ Material limits to China's military adventurism
 - ✧ China has few real allies
- ✓ China dream amidst economic slowdown;
- ✓ regional policy is full of contradictions
 - ✧ Tributary system is over but the Middle Kingdom mentality persists
 - ✧ Declining credibility, resort to checkbook diplomacy

PH quandary

- ✓ Principlism OR pragmatism towards China
- ✓ relying on an alliance whose credibility/legitimacy are in doubt
- ✓ “Exclusive” claims on resources that can only be jointly developed
- ✓ Will China respect arbitration outcomes as legally binding?

Conclusions

- No longer “David waltzing with Goliath”, but 2 Goliaths
- High uncertainty, high stakes, unpredictability as major power competition looms, but the quandaries may have moderating effects on all parties
- Big powers must not dominate discourses on SCS. Greater efforts will be needed to sustain attention on addressing maritime rights, common challenges

Options in light of SCS

- For US and China
 - Find a modus vivendi based on mutual respect and self-restraint
 - Military-to-military cooperation and confidence building
 - Expand space for middle power diplomacy and multilateral arrangements to play a bigger role

- For the Philippines

- Design a principled overarching framework that is dynamic and flexible rather than ideological/dogmatic, in light of broader regional context
- Engage both China and the US, avoid provoking conflict between major powers
- Maintain focus on finding constructive, win-win outcomes for maritime and territorial disputes for the long-term
- Contribute pro-actively to stronger and moderate consensus within ASEAN plus middle powers
- Pursue capability development in maritime security and law enforcement, with stronger self-reliance element and diversified support

- The West Philippine Sea question does not end where our EEZ or continental shelf limits lie, nor with the anticipated decision of the arbitration panel
- Philippines has been a pro-active player, must continue to be one responsibly and judiciously
- What will history say about our role?