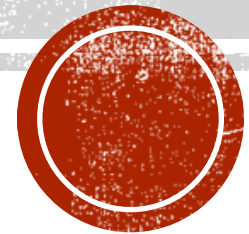


# Cooling down the Spratly Disputes: Force Building Down and Confidence Building Up

The 10<sup>th</sup> South China Sea conference

Da Nang, 8-9 November 2018



You Ji, Professor of International  
Relations, and Zhang ShuUniversity  
of Macau

# The U.S. FON as a Game Changer in Maritime Militarization

Spratly disputer  
among region  
claimants



Major power  
rivalry

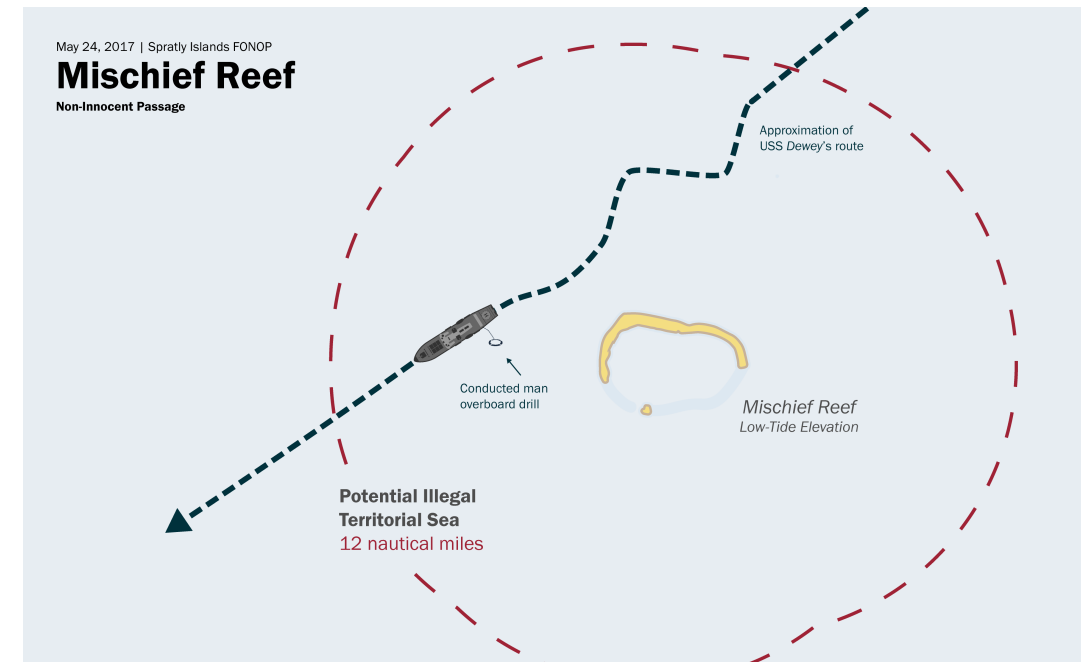
Geo-strategic  
strife

The SCS as a new geopolitical venue for  
China-US competition



# Cat-and Mouse game: U.S. FON in Spratlys

- To challenge China's sovereignty claim
- *National Security Report* and *National Defense Report* in 2017/18
  - Depicting China as a strategic adversary
- 12 nautical miles entry



# Cat-and Mouse game: U.S. FON in Spratlys

- 12-NM entry directly shortens the physical contact of warships.
- 12-NM entry increases likelihood of military standoff



## Chinese warship came within 45 yards of USS Decatur in South China Sea: US

By Luis Martinez

Oct 1, 2018, 7:21 PM ET



# Cat-and Mouse game: U.S. FON in spratly islands

- US FONOPs raise the levels of militarization, even a visible level of combatization, as FONOPS entails war drills with 12 NM that the island occupants have to response with shadowing actions
- “Fight tonight”, if an accident takes place with loss of lives and destruction of warships



# China's policy shift: from “strategic patience” to assertive protection of sovereignty

- The case of Island reclamation
- Island fortification and defense

**Island reclamation changed  
the Spratly status quo? Not  
really.**

**What status quo?**



Reclamation: all have done so, not a cause for war

**Tactical  
change**

Change of the  
appearance of the  
Spratly holdings

**Strategic  
change**

Change of Map of  
occupation

**China's Island  
reclamation**



# Reclamation: increased militarization?

- An confusing and ambiguous definition: much politicized.
- China's not beyond the scope of **fortification: non-deployment of offensive weapons systems.**
- **Without new occupation and new legal status claims**
- Beijing doesn't announce the territorial base line and base points on the reclaimed islands





# Strategic necessity for being assertive

- Being passive is no longer a rational choice to Xi Jinping
- Timing is important as the external environment is fast changing
- The price may be high
- Strategic steadiness



# **The on-going SCS policy re-adjustment**

- **A five-year cycle from sovereignty assertion back to Strategic patience**
- **Summit diplomacy, improved China-Philippine and China-Vietnam relations in regard to SCS dispute**
- **Addressing ASEAN concerns**



# The COC initiative

- Demilitarization through restraints of joint war drills by the claimant states and outside powers: *Parties shall not hold joint military exercises with countries from outside the region, unless the parties concerned are notified beforehand and express no objection. ”*
- Vietnam proposes a number of dos and don't's, including construct on any artificial island, militarize features, blockade vessels carrying provisions or personnel for rotation, declare an Air Defense Identification Zone. Beijing's policy adjustments converge many of these proposals, e.g., committing to building no facilities in any Spratly features that do not have any human inhabitation.



# New policy emphases

- **Erode connection between SCS claimants and outside powers as a way to limit the geo-political impact of Sino-US rivalry in the SCS**
- **Continuing the three-Nos, the strategic status quo will be retained.**
- **Beijing's current SCS objective is oriented towards crisis management rather than a major expansion of occupation.**



**Thank you!**

