



**China-Southeast Asia Relations:  
Facing US-led Resistance in the South China Sea\***

**Robert Sutter, George Washington University  
Chin-hao Huang, Yale-NUS College**

Xi Jinping's government entered its third year registering significant gains in advancing control in the South China Sea. China's bold tactics involving massive dredging and rapid construction, shows of force through large military exercises, deployments of its Coast Guard fleet, and movement of massed fishing vessels and large oil rigs warned weaker neighbors of China's power and determination to have its way. Most recently, US Pacific Command's Adm. Harry Harris said that the dredging over the past 18 months rapidly created 3,000 acres of Chinese island territory, which is widely seen for military use and maritime control.

Apart from the Philippines and Vietnam, China's Southeast Asian neighbors have adopted a low posture on the advances. ASEAN has generally eschewed explicit criticism of China's behavior. Nevertheless, US rhetoric has become increasingly strident and it has deployed military forces in opposition to China's behavior, reaching a high point in tension over the summer. US allies Japan and Australia also took steps to counter the Chinese moves. Malaysia, this year's ASEAN chair, went against China in allowing a full discussion of the South China Sea disputes at the various ASEAN foreign ministerial meetings in August. Placed on the defensive and seeking to avoid further deterioration in relations with Southeast Asia and the United States, Beijing offered words of reassurance and conciliation, emphasizing common interests with ASEAN and the US in peaceful economic development and other areas. Such soft tactics have questionable credibility outside China; they have been tried in the past two years with little meaningful impact on China's determination to advance control in the South China Sea.

**The United States, China, and rising tensions in the South China Sea**

US criticism of Chinese island building at the turn of the year increased over the summer. This dynamic in the South China Sea represented the key determinant in China-Southeast Asia relations. Without the strength of the US and its recent public resolve, China-Southeast Asia relations would have been different. In particular, it would have been unlikely that Southeast Asian nations would have been able or willing to slow and deter China's expansion. As a result, the US-China dynamic in the South China Sea is briefly reviewed here as a key part of the context and a determinant of China-Southeast Asia relations.

A pattern of US criticism and Chinese response showed in President Barack Obama's now more frequent public criticisms of China. In late April, the president criticized Chinese coercion over

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\* This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015. Preferred citation: Robert Sutter and Chin-hao Huang, "China-Southeast Asia Relations: Facing US-led Opposition in the South China Sea," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015, pp.65-76.

maritime disputes, which, in turn, prompted criticism by China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson. A May 12 *Wall Street Journal* report said that Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter was considering options to send surveillance aircraft over Chinese controlled land features in the South China Sea and to send US Navy ships to within 12 nautical miles of reefs that have recently been built up as islands by China. This prompted an unusually sharp response by the Foreign Ministry based on no official US action and only on an unofficial media report.

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 13, Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel cited Southeast Asian governments' worry over Chinese behavior in the South China Sea as supporting US determination to place the issue at the forefront of ASEAN-led multilateral forums. He noted the administration's push for ASEAN and China to conclude a code of conduct on the South China Sea disputes in time for the East Asia Summit (EAS) in November 2015. Secretary of State John Kerry's discussion of Chinese island building in meetings with the Chinese foreign and defense ministers in Beijing on May 16 prompted strong affirmations from the Chinese officials of Beijing's "unshakable" and "hard as a rock" determination to defend its maritime claims in the South China Sea.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson issued numerous statements beginning on May 20 condemning as provocative and dangerous a US reconnaissance flight carrying a *CNN* television crew that recorded and later broadcast a series of eight warnings by radio from Chinese military personnel as the plane neared Chinese-controlled reefs in the disputed South China Sea. The Defense Department said such flights were routine and would continue. Assistant Secretary Russel said the flight was "entirely appropriate" as an exercise of the US right to operate in international waters and airspace.

Secretary Carter bluntly affirmed in a speech in Hawaii on May 27 that such flights would continue, that China's approach to territorial disputes was out of step with regional norms, and that Southeast Asian and broader regional concerns over China's behavior increased the demand for US involvement in South China Sea matters. Truculent Chinese reaction to the speech included commentary in official Chinese media headlined "no one tells us what to do, Beijing says." Adding to tensions was an interview with a Chinese Foreign Ministry maritime boundary specialist released on May 27 reaffirming China's right to establish an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea.

Secretary Carter used his May 30 speech at the Shangri-La Forum in Singapore to criticize China as out of step with regional norms, to affirm US determination to conduct freedom of navigation and overflight, and to press for a halt to land reclamation and the completion of a code of conduct between ASEAN and China regarding the South China Sea. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman made a six-point rebuttal to Carter's speech. In his speech to the Forum, Chinese Adm. Sun Jianguo balanced his defense of China's maritime rights with words of reassurance about seeking peace and mutually beneficial economic development in pursuit of "common destiny" between China and its neighbors.

Sharp US-China rhetorical sparring over the South China Sea subsided a bit in the wake of the Chinese Foreign Ministry announcement on June 16 that the land reclamation efforts would be completed "in the upcoming days," and in the lead-up to the annual China-US Security and

Economic Dialogue meetings on June 22-24. Nevertheless, Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken in a speech in Washington on June 26 equated Chinese coercion in the South China Sea with Russia's behavior in Ukraine. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a speech in Beijing on June 27 advised that any weakening of China's stance on the South China Sea by the current leaders would "shame" their ancestors.

July saw even less rhetorical sparring, but actions by both the US and China underlined prevailing tensions influencing China's relations with Southeast Asia. US Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Scott Swift, visiting the Philippines, flew in a reconnaissance plane operating for seven hours over the South China Sea on July 18. More importantly, beginning on July 20, China conducted over 10 days its largest live-fire military exercise in the South China Sea involving more than 100 naval vessels and dozens of aircraft. Media coverage said the exercise showed the abilities of the Chinese forces in joint operations, defense against supersonic anti-ship missiles, and anti-submarine warfare. A Chinese admiral in *People's Daily* said the exercises included testing China's *DF-21* ballistic missile, which has been developed to sink large surface ships, notably US aircraft carriers.

### **ASEAN, multilateral meetings in Malaysia**

Against this background of tension in the South China Sea featuring China and the US, ASEAN and Southeast Asian governments prepared for annual ASEAN-hosted meetings held in Kuala Lumpur in the first week of August. The meetings included the 48<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting; the Post Ministerial Conference sessions with the the foreign ministers of ASEAN's dialogue partners, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Secretary of State Kerry; the fifth EAS Foreign Ministers Meeting; and the 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

Publicly emphasizing the positive in China-ASEAN relations, the Malaysian foreign minister announced on July 31 that ASEAN and China had agreed to proceed to the "next stage" in the prolonged negotiations toward the establishment of a code of conduct for the South China Sea. International media reports also said that ASEAN and China agreed to establish an emergency hotline for foreign ministers to communicate about the South China Sea; the intent is to use the hotline to deescalate hostile situations through immediate, high-level talks. Subsequently, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the EAS foreign ministers and the ARF that progress in code of conduct talks over the last two years has seen the two sides adopt two lists of "commonalities" (presumably areas of common ground) and begin consultation on "crucial and complex issues" (presumably areas of important differences); and they have agreed to establish "two hotline platforms which will be up and running soon." He added that China took the initiative to propose "preventive measures on managing perils at sea," which he said are under discussion in the code of conduct talks.

At the outset of the meetings in Malaysia, Foreign Minister Wang and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin argued against allowing a discussion of the South China Sea issues at the ASEAN-hosted meetings and they opposed countries apart from China and Southeast Asia being involved in such discussions. In contrast, the Malaysian hosts, including the prime minister and foreign minister, favored active discussion of South China Sea issues; and the communiqué following the 48<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting on Aug. 4 registered the group's serious concern

with recent developments in the South China Sea, noting specifically “land reclamations” that have raised “tensions” and “undermined peace.” The subsequent meetings involved South China Sea issues and included other countries’ foreign ministers, with Secretary Kerry playing a prominent role. The secretary’s remarks at US meetings with ASEAN, the EAS Foreign Ministers Meeting, and the ARF focused on calls to halt land reclamation in the South China Sea and to conclude a code of conduct in 2015. He also reaffirmed US determination to pursue overflight and navigation in the South China Sea.

Foreign Minister Wang made three proposals at a press conference after he met with the ASEAN foreign ministers on Aug 5. The first initiative is that countries in the South China Sea pledge to implement the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in a comprehensive, effective, and complete way, accelerate consultations on formulating a code of conduct for the South China Sea, and actively discuss “precautionary measures for maritime risk management and control.” Second, countries outside the region pledge to support the above-mentioned efforts by countries in the region, and do not take actions that may cause tension and complexity in the region. Third, countries pledge to exercise and safeguard their freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea in accordance with international law.

Wang also told the media at the ASEAN meetings that China’s land reclamation in the South China Sea had stopped. The Philippine Foreign Ministry spokesman said the reclamation stopped because China succeeded in forming the islands. China was seen at home and abroad as moving to a second phase of constructing facilities with military applications on the islands, which the Philippines, the United States, Australia, Japan, and other powers viewed as destabilizing.

Endeavoring to look beyond the negatives for China in disputes with Southeast Asian nations over the South China Sea, Foreign Minister Wang stressed common interest in peaceful economic cooperation of mutual benefit. He put forward 10 new proposals on further deepening China-ASEAN cooperation, including boosting regional connectivity and cooperating in industrial production. As reported by official Chinese media, Wang, during meetings of the ARF and EAS foreign ministers, rebuffed US calls for a halt in Chinese (and other claimants’) construction activities, rebuked Japan for its criticism of Chinese island building, and focused on rejoinders to the Philippines’ criticisms of China’s South China Sea policies and practices.

### **Fractional Philippines-China relations**

There has been no improvement in the overall poor relations between the Philippines and China going back to the Chinese takeover of Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Acrimonious exchanges between the foreign ministries and other senior officials over disputes in the South China Sea characterize relations. On May 5, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman provided a detailed rebuttal to charges made by a Philippines Foreign Ministry spokesman that China’s island construction in the disputed South China Sea violated the DOC reached by China and ASEAN in 2002. The Chinese complaint said the Philippines was the violator of commitments, notably refusing to follow through with an alleged promise to remove its grounded ship on Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines was also accused of violating the DOC by initiating an arbitration case with the International Permanent Court of Arbitration challenging China’s South China Sea claims.

Prior to the widely publicized incident where the US reconnaissance plane was warned away by radio messages from Chinese military personnel when approaching a Chinese-occupied island in the South China Sea on May 20, a Philippine admiral said on May 7 that Philippine patrol planes had been warned away by radio at least six times by Chinese personnel near disputed islands. China's Foreign Ministry replied to the Philippine complaint that the warnings were within China's rights. China complained when the Philippines military chief Gen. Gergorio Pio Catapang flew on May 11 with a delegation including journalists to the Philippine occupied but China claimed Thitu Island (Philippines: Pag-asa, China: Zhongye).

In early June, President Benigno Aquino visited Japan where advances in closer relations included the start of discussions leading to a status of forces agreement that would allow Japanese forces to use the Philippines in conducting operations in the South China Sea. While in Japan, Aquino revived his earlier charge that Chinese advances in the South China Sea mimicked those of Nazi Germany as it encroached on neighboring countries prior to World War II; the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman responded sharply.

Later that month, Philippines and US forces held a week of exercises near the South China Sea, and Philippines and Japanese military forces concurrently held exercises in the South China Sea. Official Chinese commentary rebuked such actions as "playing with fire."

The Philippines foreign minister made a presentation before the five-member tribunal hearing Manila's case against China's South China Sea claims at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The hearing went from July 7 to 13. Representatives from Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam were present. A ruling from the tribunal on jurisdiction was expected in 90 days. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson reaffirmed Beijing's unwillingness to participate in the proceedings.

A Philippine Navy spokesperson said on July 15 that the Philippines was making repairs on the rusting World War II ship that was intentionally ran aground on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson strongly protested the action. In 2014, Chinese vessels blocked resupply to the small contingent (about 10) of Philippine military personnel stationed on the ship. On May 10, 2015, a Philippine lawmaker said that he had information that a Chinese Coast Guard ship for the previous month had "dropped anchor" near the Philippine forces on Second Thomas Shoal; he viewed this Chinese presence as a "serious threat" to the outpost. The Philippine defense secretary told the media on Aug. 26 that Manila had asked the US to provide air surveillance for Philippine ships bringing supplies to Second Thomas Shoal in the face of Chinese intimidation. He said such flights had deterred Chinese efforts to block Philippine resupply missions in the recent past.

At the ARF and EAS Foreign Ministers Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in August, Foreign Minister Wang devoted the bulk of his critical comments to the Philippines, according to official Chinese media. He reviewed Chinese opposition to the Philippine case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration and China's criticism of Philippine actions on disputed Second Thomas Shoal – both seen to violate the DOC, according to Beijing. He underlined China's case that the Philippine claim to Scarborough Shoal, occupied by Chinese Coast Guard forces since 2012, is contradicted

by international treaties defining the country's boundary to the east of the shoal. Wang looked to the future, presumably with an eye toward the replacement of the remarkably anti-China stance of President Aquino with a new president in May 2016 elections. He appealed to "the people of the Philippines" not to be "held hostage by a tiny number of individuals," but to pursue a path of improved relations with China.

### **Vietnam maneuvers between China and the United States**

Sino-Vietnamese relations are still recovering from the crisis caused by China's abrupt deployment in May 2014 of the *HD-981* oil rig and an armada of protecting coast guard, naval, and fishing vessels in waters claimed by Vietnam, which resulted in mass anti-China violence in Vietnam. Such Chinese assertiveness has been widely seen to increase incentives for Vietnam and the US to defer differences and develop common approaches in dealing with China.

Partly to head off such US-Vietnamese cooperation, China has sought to deepen economic and infrastructure ties with Vietnam, thereby increasing Vietnam's dependence on China. During a visit to China in April by Vietnam's Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong, Beijing offered a large package of projects that would further integrate Vietnam with China's economy. In May, China also initiated an unprecedented meeting of the Chinese and Vietnamese defense ministers along their mutual land border. According to *Xinhua*, the Chinese and Vietnamese delegates to the Shangri-La Forum met on May 29 to discuss the South China Sea. In apparent reference to the US, Japan, and other countries improving relations with Hanoi, the Chinese delegate advised that Hanoi "should have a clear understanding about the motives of countries outside the region trying to meddle in the issue." In June, Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh met Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing amid reports of greater Sino-Vietnamese economic cooperation.

At the same time, Chinese hard tactics continue, notably the massive island building in areas of the South China Sea claimed by Vietnam and the entry in June of *HD-981* into waters south of Hainan Island. The rig was placed in an area claimed by Vietnam, though it was on the Chinese side of any median line likely to be determined between the two nations. Vietnam also protested China's annual fishing ban in the South China Sea and episodes of alleged harsh treatment of Vietnamese fishermen by China's Coast Guard.

Against this background, Vietnam welcomed Defense Secretary Carter for a widely publicized visit in June, resulting in a vision statement deepening defense cooperation. Communist Party chief Trong, the most powerful Vietnamese leader, made his first visit to Washington, meeting President Obama on July 7 and issuing a joint vision statement forecasting closer relations. Trong told a Washington think tank audience that his country's security needs were "huge" and likely to lead to expanded military cooperation with the United States. Probably no coincidence, during the following week Chinese Deputy Prime Minister and Politburo Standing Committee member Zhang Gaoli visited Hanoi to consolidate infrastructure, economic zones, highways, and other proposed economic projects. Meanwhile, Vietnam and Japan advanced their common ground during Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh's late July visit to Japan. Pham met Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio, praised the

Vietnamese-Japanese strategic partnership as at “the highest level ever,” had in-depth talks on South China Sea issues, and discussed yen loans and infrastructure development.

### **Roles of Japan, Australia, and India**

Chinese commentaries saw China facing opposition not just from the US and some Southeast Asian countries as international attention to the disputes over China’s island building in the South China Sea grew. They noted G-7 opposition and particularly the role of Japan, as well as moves by Australia and India as being adverse to Chinese interests. Some saw China unjustifiably “besieged” by foreign forces working with the US to prevent China from advancing its claims and attaining greater control and maritime dominance in the South China Sea.

Significant Japanese actions in this reporting period included two Japanese destroyers visiting the Philippines for their first bilateral naval exercise since World War II. The Japanese defense minister previewed his remarks at the Shangri-La Forum with a media interview on May 27 asserting that despite China’s stated opposition Japan was considering sending Self-Defense Forces to the South China Sea to monitor Chinese island building in cooperation with the US. In early June, *Xinhua* and the Foreign Ministry spokesperson attacked Japan for encouraging the G-7 countries to criticize China’s island building and “maliciously creating tensions in the South China Sea.” On June 18, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide took aim at Chinese island building and asserted that Japan does not accept Beijing’s unilateral actions to change the status quo, prompting a rebuke from China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

On June 23, a Japanese military reconnaissance plane landed at a remote Philippines base along the South China Sea, welcomed aboard three Philippines naval officers and conducted surveillance in nearby waters. The exercise was criticized by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Speaking in Washington on July 30, the commander of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Forces warned of the South China Sea coming under China’s dominance and argued that US allies must enhance their power and “synchronize” with the US. Along these lines, a small contingent of Japanese infantry was embedded with the US 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit and deployed to Australia to participate in the large (over 30,000 troops) annual US-Australian Exercise *Talisman Sabre* during July.

Also in July, Prime Minister Abe welcomed government leaders of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam for a summit of Mekong nations in Tokyo. They agreed on a document outlining their new cooperation strategy that contained language expressing concern over recent developments in the South China Sea. Japan pledged \$6.1 billion in aid to the countries over the next three years. The pledge represented a 20 percent increase over the \$4.9 billion in aid Japan pledged to these countries at the previous Mekong summit three years ago. The new funds came from Abe’s Asian investment initiative announced in May to provide \$110 billion to promote “quality infrastructure” in Asia over the next five years. That Japanese move was seen as competing with China’s recent promises of funding for Asian infrastructure. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman responding to a question on the Tokyo summit’s expressed concern over the South China Sea with a rebuke of Tokyo’s involvement with the South China Sea issue.

At the foreign ministers meetings in Kuala Lumpur in August, Foreign Minister Wang accused Japan of hypocrisy in criticizing Chinese island building the South China Sea while Japan has gone through the very expensive process of converting the “Rock of Okinotori” into a “man-made island” in order to expand the size of Japan’s claimed exclusive economic zone. After those meetings, official Chinese media reported that Japan was preparing to provide the Philippines with three surveillance aircraft along with training and maintenance. Media queries to the Chinese foreign and defense ministries elicited vague and noncommittal statements, urging “relevant countries” not to take actions against regional peace and stability.

Though Chinese official media commentary tended to avoid criticism of Australia, the Australian government repeatedly stood against China’s actions in the South China Sea and engaged in military actions and diplomacy concerned with implications of Chinese expansion. Australia’s foreign minister told the media on May 11 that China should not create an ADIZ in the South China Sea. In a speech on May 27, Australia’s defense secretary warned against the implications of China’s rapid construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea leading to military tensions and miscalculation.

On May 31, the Australian defense minister said that Australia is not concerned about possible Chinese objections to reconnaissance flights over disputed waters and that Australia would continue to fly long-range patrols over the South China Sea. The remarks came as *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the US and Australia were discussing the possibility of Australia joining the US in joint patrols and so-called freedom of navigation operations in and over waters China considers its own but which Australia and the US view as international waters. The Australian defense minister joined his US and Japanese counterparts in a meeting during the Shangri-La Forum on May 31 that issued a joint statement expressing strong concern over China’s land reclamation in the South China Sea.

Bringing India into the complicated calculus of contingencies prompted by Chinese expansion in the South China Sea, the Australian foreign affairs department chief told media in India on June 9 that China’s activities in the South China Sea had been a topic in meetings with his Indian and Japanese counterparts in New Delhi. He advised that the cooperation among the three powers is not directed at another power and that Australia did not have an anti-China position. Meanwhile, *Reuters* on July 22 reported that Indian, Japanese, and US officials met at a US base in Japan to discuss the annual *Malibar* exercises planned for October. China at times in the past has reacted strongly against the annual exercise, notably in 2007 when aircraft carrier battle groups from the US and India were joined by forces from Australia, Japan, and Singapore in carrying out large scale exercises in the Bay of Bengal near the opening of the Malacca Strait. Subsequent exercises were more modest and took place in areas less sensitive to China. Last year’s exercise involved the US, India, and Japan; it took place in waters near Japan and saw Indian participation limited to two warships and a tanker.

### **China-Myanmar developments**

China-Myanmar relations saw a number of interesting developments, chief among which was Aung San Suu Kyi’s visit to Beijing in early June. President Xi Jinping indicated that Beijing is keen to reach out to and strengthen ties with the National League for Democracy (NLD).



Recognizing that the NLD is poised to gain a notable majority in the upcoming national elections this fall, Xi expressed hopes that “the Myanmar side will maintain a consistent stance on China-Myanmar relationship and be committed to advancing friendly ties, no matter how its domestic situation changes.”

Aung San Suu Kyi’s Beijing visit attracted significant attention from the international community. In spite of her longstanding defiance of authoritarian military regimes, she did not press the Chinese government to release fellow Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiabo. Instead, Aung San Suu Kyi took the opportunity of her first visit to China to demonstrate her and the NLD’s political and diplomatic credentials. She reassured her hosts that the NLD attaches great importance to the historical friendship between Myanmar and China and that it hoped to further strengthen party-to-party relations with the visit.

The visit comes at a critical moment in bilateral relations. Official relations between Beijing and Nay Pyi Taw saw growing tensions with border incidents in March that killed four Chinese nationals in Yunnan Province. Bombs dropped by Myanmar government aircraft landed in Chinese territory during clashes between the Myanmar government and ethnic militant groups. The Myanmar government issued an apology and subsequently removed a senior air force official in response to the bombing incident. The Chinese government has since increased border patrols and held live-ammunition exercises.

In July, a court in northern Myanmar sentenced 153 Chinese nationals to life in prison for illegal logging in Myanmar’s Kachin state. China lodged formal protests over the severity of the sentences, with its Foreign Ministry asking Myanmar to “consider the actual situation of those loggers and deal with the matter in a lawful, reasonable and sensible way.” It was subsequently reported that Myanmar rescinded the sentence and granted amnesty to the 153 Chinese nationals.

## **Outlook**

The Xi Jinping government endeavored to play down South China Sea frictions in the latter months of 2013 and in the same period in 2014. Such a pattern could hold in 2015 given the importance the Xi government gives to the September summit with President Obama and the meetings with Asia-Pacific leaders at the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in the Philippines and the East Asian Summit in Malaysia in November. The episodes of moderation in the past two years did not last long. Today, China continues to face serious domestic problems but it also remains determined to advance control over disputed territory; and the US – supported by regional allies and other countries in Southeast Asia – stands against Chinese coercive expansion at its neighbors’ expense. Against this background, forecasts of increased tensions over the South China Sea may be more likely. Rapid Chinese militarization of South China Sea outposts and declaration of an ADIZ in the South China Sea are among Chinese initiatives that could raise tensions. The US or its allies could raise tensions with more intrusive freedom of navigation patrols or overflights of territory China sees as its own.

## **Chronology of China-Southeast Asia Relations May – August 2015**

**May 7, 2015:** China and Thailand pledge to increase cooperation in railway construction, law enforcement, and tourism as the two sides celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of official ties.

**May 15, 2015:** Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs lodges formal protests to the Myanmar government as two new incidents of shelling attacks injure Chinese civilians residing in the border city of Lincang, Yunnan Province. The Myanmar government puts the blame on the Kokang ethnic army for this latest round of border shelling attacks.

**May 18, 2015:** Xu Qiliang, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission (CMC), meets Malaysian Defense Ministry Secretary General Abdul Rahim in Beijing for the second round of the China-Malaysia Defense and Security Consultation.

**May 21, 2015:** Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs raises concerns with Indonesia over reports of Jakarta's blowing up and sinking Chinese fishing boats suspected of illegal fishing.

**May 26, 2015:** ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) *Disaster Relief Exercises (DiREx) 2015* convenes in Malaysia and is co-chaired by Beijing and Kuala Lumpur. The discussion focuses on regional coordination and cooperation on disaster relief mechanisms.

**May 27-31, 2015:** Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong visits Indonesia and meets President Joko Widodo and attends the second China-Southeast Asia High-Level People-to-People Dialogue.

**June 11, 2015:** Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Myanmar's National League for Democracy chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi in Beijing. They agree to forge stronger party-to-party ties.

**June 13, 2015:** Third round of the China-Southeast Asia Expo convenes in Kunming with regional leaders agreeing to strengthen regional cooperation in agriculture, energy, infrastructure linkages, and people-to-people exchanges.

**June 25, 2015:** China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) places *Haiyang Shiyou 981* oil rig platform off the coast of Hainan but within the Chinese side of the median line between China and Vietnam.

**June 29, 2015:** The Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand express their interest in the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) but decide against signing the bank's founding articles of agreement at the launch ceremony of the new bank in Beijing. Singapore pledges to contribute \$250 million to the bank and is committed to being a founding member of AIIB.

**July 9, 2015:** Senior Chinese and Cambodian defense officials meet in Beijing and agree to improve high-level military contacts and to deepen bilateral and multilateral security cooperation in tackling regional non-traditional security issues.

**July 9, 2015:** Thai officials agree to repatriate 109 illegal Uighur immigrants to China. Chinese Ministry of Public Security had earlier identified and implicated the illegal immigrants' alleged involvement in terrorist and other illegal activities such as human trafficking.

**July 16, 2015:** Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli visits Hanoi and meets senior officials. The two sides discuss the prospects of carrying out a joint survey of the Beibu/Tonkin Gulf to develop economic cooperation in the region.

**July 7-13, 2015:** The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague holds its hearings on the South China Sea. Representatives from Manila put forward the case against Beijing's claims. Beijing reiterates it will not participate in the case nor send representatives to the tribunal.

**July 29, 2015:** Ninth China-ASEAN senior officials meeting on the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) is held in Tianjin to discuss a code of conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.

**July 31, 2015:** China and Southeast Asian nations agree to set up a foreign ministers' hotline to address emergencies, avoid accidents and miscalculations in the South China Sea. The regional hotline will be the first involving China. Manila and Hanoi established a naval hotline in 2014 to monitor ongoing events in the South China Sea.

**Aug. 4-7, 2015:** Regional leaders convene in Kuala Lumpur to take part in a series of ASEAN-related foreign ministers meetings and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Malaysia Prime Minister Najib Razak, as host of the meetings, underscores ASEAN's importance in playing a more central and active role in managing the South China Sea disputes.

**Aug. 10, 2015:** Chinese and Vietnamese military officials meet in Hanoi for the eighth round of Defense and Security Consultations. They agree to strengthen border exchanges, deepen multilateral security cooperation, and manage differences through consultation.

**Aug. 17, 2015:** A bomb explodes in central Bangkok, claiming 20 victims (including 2 Chinese), and injuring 123 bystanders. More than two-dozen countries, including China, issue travel advisories warning citizens against visiting Thailand as a result of the bombing incident.

**August 24, 2015:** China's National Narcotics Control Commission and the Indonesian Narcotics Agency announce plans to increase bilateral cooperation to combat drug trafficking, including sharing of information to detect and prevent illicit drug production and distribution in the region.