

UNDER THE DRAGON'S WING:
A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CHINA'S MILITARIZATION EFFORTS OF ITS
ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Strategic Studies

by

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2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 09-06-2017		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2016 – JUNE 2017	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Under the Dragon's Wing: A Strategic Approach to China's Militarization Efforts of Its Artificial Islands in the South China Sea				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Justin L. Reddick, Lieutenant Commander				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT In recent months, there have been multiple reports about increased activity by the Chinese government in the South China Sea (SCS). These reports include Chinese construction of artificial islands on top of reefs in the disputed Spratly island chain. By adding weapons systems and constructing airfields capable of landing any military aircraft in their inventory, the tension between China and its neighboring nations has slowly increased. But with no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern does the United States Government (USG) have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS? What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)? What impact does China's advanced Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS? What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the region? These and other questions will be addressed in order to assess the best use of the military as an instrument of national power in order to challenge the Chinese militarization of artificial islands in the SCS.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS China, Artificial Island, Strategy, A2AD, Navy, National Security, South China Sea.					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: UNCLASSIFIED (U)			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 88	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Thesis Title: Under the Dragon's Wing: A Strategic Approach to China's Militarization
Efforts of Its Artificial Islands in the South China Sea

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

UNDER THE DRAGON'S WING: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CHINA'S MILITARIZATION EFFORTS OF ITS ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, by Lieutenant Commander Justin L. Reddick, 88 pages.

In recent months, there have been multiple reports about increased activity by the Chinese government in the South China Sea (SCS). These reports include Chinese construction of artificial islands on top of reefs in the disputed Spratly island chain. By adding weapons systems and constructing airfields capable of landing any military aircraft in their inventory, the tension between China and its neighboring nations has slowly increased. But with no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern does the United States Government (USG) have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS? What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)? What impact does China's advanced Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS? What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the region? These and other questions will be addressed in order to assess the best use of the military as an instrument of national power in order to challenge the Chinese militarization of artificial islands in the SCS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Command and General Staff College Master of Military Arts and Sciences Committee members for their selfless commitment as they helped me successfully navigate this process. To Dr. Jack Kem, thank you for your guidance and mentorship as I went through this process. Your encouragement, candor, and support were a constant reminder to me and forced me to seek the best in my work and myself. To Commander John Courtright, U.S. Navy, thank you for always forcing me to consider other thought processes and never letting me accept less than the best. To Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Donalblain, U.S. Army, thank you for your insights and perspective as I refined this thesis.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support I have received thus far throughout my Navy career. To Commander Ian Burgoon (U.S. Navy, Retired), thank you for showing me that no task is too small as to not warrant your best efforts. To Captain Kevin McLaughlin, U.S. Navy, thank you for having faith in my efforts and for giving me the chance to succeed. To Captain Robert Osterhoudt, U.S. Navy, thank you for your kindness, support, and personal recommendations without which I would never have had this opportunity. To the countless others that have had a lasting impact on my career in the Navy up to this point I say thank you and I remain in your debt.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Brooke for her unwavering support during this process. She carried the unique responsibility of being my primary sounding board and has definitely heard more than her fair share about the inner-workings of China and the South China Sea. Her personal experiences growing up in Australia provided a unique lens from which to view this thesis and helped me to gain a

better and more personal understanding of the region. This understanding combined with her unmatched patience during many nights of reading and study are what truly made this possible. You are the best thing to ever happen to me and I do and always will love you more than the most.

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ACRONYMS

A/A	Air-to-Air
A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
AOR	Area of Responsibility
A/S	Air-to-Surface
AWC	Army Warfighting Challenge
CSG	Carrier Strike Group
DOD	Department of Defense
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FONOPS	Freedom of Navigation Operations
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commander
GPS	Global Positioning System
HN	Host Nation
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organization
IO	Information Operations
LOE	Line of Effort
MN	Multi-National
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
PACOM	U.S. Pacific Command
PIM	Plan of Intended Movement
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy

PLAN(AF)	People's Liberation Army Navy Air Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
ROK	Republic of Korea
S/A	Surface-to-Air
SCS	South China Sea
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
S/S	Surface-to-Surface
TBM	Theater Ballistic Missile
TSC	Theater Security Cooperation
UHF	Ultra-High Frequency
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USG	United States Government
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	United States Navy
VHF	Very-High Frequency

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Some foreigners with full bellies and nothing better to do engage in finger pointing at us. First, China does not export revolution; second, it does not export famine and poverty; and third, it does not mess around with you. So what else is there to say?

— Chinese President Xi Jinping

In recent months, there have been multiple reports about increased activity by the Chinese government in the South China Sea (SCS). To those uninformed on the matter, the reports seemed like something out of a movie – the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was constructing artificial islands in the SCS. To further complicate the matter, the PRC was also adding weapons systems and airfields capable of landing any military aircraft in their inventory. The reports of the militarization of these artificial islands have increased the already high tensions between China and some of its neighboring nations such as the Philippines and Vietnam. As a result of China’s conduct in the SCS, both the Philippines and Vietnam have sought support from the United States Government (USG). These requests have come in the form of military partnerships and renewed diplomatic relations. But with no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern does the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS? How do the views of the USG and China differ on the SCS? What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS? Why should the USG enforce UNCLOS when it is not a signatory? What impact does China’s advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS? Finally, what

options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region? These and other questions will be explored in this thesis.

Primary Research Question

Before beginning the research process, it is important to first understand the intent of the research. This thesis is intended to help facilitate a strategic approach to the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS. In developing a strategic approach, the implication is that the current strategy is lacking in some way, potentially ineffective, or the conditions have changed. In either case, the determination must be made as to whether the USG should devote resources toward this issue, and if so, what level of resources. In order to make this determination, it helps to look at the issue from the perspective of U.S. national interests. While not necessarily a U.S. vital interest, the economic impacts alone make it at least an important one. An estimated \$5.3 trillion worth of goods travels through the SCS each year. Any interruption in the free-flow of trade would clearly affect the global economy. Next, it is important to understand the options available to the USG. These options can be viewed as opposite ends of a spectrum that can be leveraged depending on the circumstances. On one hand, the USG could take a sideline approach and neither support nor condemn China's land reclamation activities despite the territorial sovereignty disputes. This could be interpreted as "silence is consent" and strengthen China's ability to ultimately claim the entire region. On the other hand, the USG could actively condemn China's activities by full-scale military operations or by taking the case before the United Nations. Considering the extreme nature of these options, a third may be to take an approach from somewhere in the middle. The rationale behind a middle of the road approach is due to China being a

necessary working partner on a variety of other strategic issues such as North Korea. It is from this middle option that the impetus for the primary research question came about. With this in mind, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” is an extremely relevant question. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS), among other appropriate measures, may be the most efficient way at present to challenge China’s expansion in the SCS and maintain the status quo so that our treaty partners remain assured, and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region remains intact. Based upon the primary research question, this will now be analyzed by the researcher.

The primary research question is on a broader level addressing the precedent being set by China. If the USG chose not to involve itself in the enforcement of the global commons, then other territorial disputes within international waters could become a common occurrence. Global commons such as the Arabian Gulf, Black Sea, and others could be at risk from similar ventures by nation-states attempting to mirror China’s actions. However, assuming it has been established that an absolute position on either side of the spectrum is probably not the best position to take, then the primary research question’s purpose is to determine how much, if any, involvement U.S. military air and sea power should have. The delicate balance of strategic goals in the overall Asia-Pacific region drive the level of involvement of the USG. Considering the complexity of the region and its many different relationships, actors, functions, and tensions, the USG must not risk losing a partner of opportunity when mutually beneficial.

The SCS, given its location, holds a highly strategic value because of its access to the majority of the South Pacific Ocean and critical Sea Lines of Communication

(SLOCs). In accordance with UNCLOS, major bodies of water like the SCS are considered global commons, and are granted equal use by all. Since the construction and militarization of artificial islands by China in the Spratly island area of the SCS can be viewed as a first step to lay claim to the entire region, the USG must respond if for no other reason than to prevent precedent. Since the primary research question deals with air and maritime challenges in the global commons in accordance with UNCLOS, the idea of enforcement must be addressed. Enforcement of UNCLOS by the USG while not a signatory is something that will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

The USG has many forms of national power at its disposal for influencing a desired end state in the SCS. In particular, the military as an instrument of national power could be used in a variety of ways to help the USG achieve a desired end state. According to the most recent National Security Strategy (NSS), the USG is committed to “freedom of navigation and overflight as well as the safety and sustainability of the air and maritime environments” (Obama 2015, 13). The NSS even goes further to say that “coercion and assertive behaviors that threaten escalation” in response to territorial disputes in Asia will not be viewed favorably by the USG (Obama 2015, 13). Therefore, as a matter of national security and policy, the USG’s desired end state in the SCS would be one without conflict where the free flow of commerce continues unimpeded (Obama 2015, 13). The comparison between the desired end states of both the USG and China will be covered in detail in chapter 2. In order for the USG to work towards its end state in the SCS, the military as an instrument of national power may open the door for the remaining instruments; diplomatic, information, and economic, to help form a whole of government approach. Throughout this thesis, the idea of a balanced strategy must also

be addressed. The USG may need to consider an approach that maintains the status quo in the SCS in order to foster a working relationship with China on other important regional and world issues. Based upon the primary research question, this thesis will examine whether or not the USG should use the military instrument of national power to challenge the militarization of China's artificial islands. The answer to this question will help guide the researcher on how to best move forward with the strategic goal of ensuring that the global commons of the SCS remain open, the USG's partners remain assured, and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region is maintained by using a way such as FONOPS or other appropriate measures.

Secondary Research Questions

In order to answer the primary research question, "Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?" there are a few secondary questions that must also be answered. As the secondary research questions are addressed, the researcher will determine how the military as an instrument of national power can be used in order to aid the remaining instruments in order to achieve the desired effects.

The secondary questions to be answered in this thesis are:

1. With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?
2. What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?

3. What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?
4. What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?

The first secondary research questions is designed to establish whether the situation in the SCS meets the USG's requirements for involvement in accordance with its national interests. If the determination is made to get involved based upon these interests, the second secondary research question then provides an opportunity to consider options available to the USG. Again, even though the USG is not a signatory of UNCLOS, justification for its enforcement will be detailed in chapter 4. The third secondary research question addresses the threat to U.S. military-level operations. Specifically, the focus on the lengths China is taking to deny access to the SCS. The last secondary research question addresses how the USG can use its partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region to aid in achieving a strategic end state in accordance with USG national security and policy. Once all the secondary questions have been answered, the results can be used to aid in answering the primary research question. The answer to the primary research question will assist the researcher in developing conclusions and providing recommendations for future research.

Assumptions

In order to frame the research that applies to the primary research question, "Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?" some assumptions must first be discussed. The assumptions chosen are those the researcher believes are necessary in order to continue with the

remainder of the research. The first assumption is that China will continue to increase its claims based upon construction of artificial islands in the SCS over the next five years. This assumption is based upon the fact that China has continued its land reclamation efforts after the most recent ruling of The Hague convention in favor of the Philippines. In response to the ruling, China went so far as to refer to it as “waste paper” a statement highlighting its disregard for international law (Bingguo 2016).

The second assumption is that the USG will consider all instruments of national power when seeking a strategic end state in accordance with USG national security and policy regarding China’s militarization of its artificial islands. More specifically, that the military as an instrument of national power will be considered in order to aid the remaining instruments. Based upon the threat in the SCS due to China’s militarization of its artificial islands, any military presence or action increases the risk of incident. However, in order to answer the primary research question, which is targeted specifically toward military action, it must be assumed that the full range of military operations are available in order to issue a challenge.

The third assumption once military operations are assumed is that commanders have accepted the risk to forces based upon China’s militarization of its artificial islands in the SCS. This study’s focus is on the effects of using military air and sea power in order to challenge China’s militarization efforts. Therefore, the risk of these types of operations whether used independently or in conjunction with a partner nation is assumed accounted for. Risk based upon the specific action taken, as a direct or indirect challenge to China’s militarization of artificial islands will be covered in detail in chapter 4. Examples of direct and indirect military actions include options such as FONOPS and

Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) exercises. Any of these actions occurring as part of a planned military challenge are assumed to have already accounted for the risk of operating within China's A2/AD network. These assumptions will all be necessary in order for the researcher to answer both the secondary and primary research questions.

Terms and Definitions

The following terms will be used throughout the entire thesis with respect to the primary and secondary research questions. These terms will also be used to provide analysis to the material presented and must be properly defined so that the reader may associate them in the appropriate context.

A2/AD: Anti-Access/Area Denial does not possess a formal definition however it is best described as a combination of capabilities with the goal of preventing access to a specific area, denying operations in a pre-defined area, or both. A2/AD is sometimes used to imply that by its nature, it will be successful in preventing access and operations in a pre-defined area. This however is not correct; A2/AD is better thought of as a strategy used by one nation-state(s) to complicate the movement and maneuver of another nation-state(s) in an area where such movement and maneuver would not otherwise be restricted.

FONOPS: Freedom of Navigation Operations is a principle of customary international law that, apart from the exceptions provided for in international law; ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states. FONOPS also allows vessels to travel freely throughout international waters, defined as waters greater than 12 nautical miles from a sovereign state's shores. FONOPS can also be conducted by the use of aircraft through over flight operations in order to assert the

right to travel freely through international airspace, defined as airspace outside 12 nautical miles from a sovereign state's shores (United Nations 1982, 57).

IO: Information Operations as part of an IO Campaign are the “integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2012, iii).

TSC: Theater Security Cooperation exercises are pre-planned events between the militaries of specific nations. They can be used to strengthen partnerships, increase proficiency in deployment operations, provide logistical pre-positioning, and strategically message nations in a specific region. TSC exercises also provide a reason to have a preponderance of U.S. joint forces in a geographic Area of Responsibility (AOR).

UNCLOS: The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea document is the international agreement that resulted from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which took place between 1973 and 1982 (United Nations 1982). UNCLOS defines the specifics of internal waters, territorial waters, international waters, contiguous zones, and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations in this study will serve as the inner and outer limits emplaced by the researcher in order to answer the primary research question. The first limitation to this study is based upon the fact that there is no established precedent for one nation-state constructing artificial islands within the EEZ of another nation state in order to justify its own legal claim. In order for the researcher to apply the appropriate

analysis to this study, there must be a reference made to the established international law. The guiding document for international law regarding artificial islands and appropriate conduct within a nation-state's EEZ is UNCLOS. However, because the USG is not a signatory of UNCLOS, the second limitation of the study comes regarding the USG enforcing a UN treaty that it has not signed. The details regarding the USG as a signatory of UNCLOS will be discussed later in this thesis. This study will focus on the USG's ability to "enforce the legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS" as a matter of established precedent and not on the fact that the USG has previously done so without being a signatory. The third limitation of this study can be aligned with Army Warfighting Challenge (AWC) number twelve. Because this thesis deals with the specifics of A2/AD capabilities, it can aid in the learning demand of AWC twelve. More specifically, "how can maneuver forces leverage sea basing and the sea as maneuver space to overcome enemy anti-access capabilities and what capabilities must be developed to make this functional" (ARCIC 2016). The fourth limitation of this study is that this thesis will not be written in order to solve AWC twelve, but rather to reference the challenge itself in an effort to bring more emphasis to the A2/AD problem that affects U.S. joint forces as a whole. The fifth limitation of this study deals specifically with the problem of the militarization of the SCS. There are several active disputes over islands within the Spratly Island chain; however, this thesis will focus on the militarization of artificial islands being constructed by China throughout the SCS. The sixth limitation of this study is in reference to the naming convention of China. When mentioned throughout the course of this thesis, "China" is intended to denote the PRC, which does not include Taiwan. Even though China may include the EEZ of Taiwan in its broader maritime and

airspace claims, the researcher acknowledges this as a limitation and will include amplifying information in this area as required. The detailed analysis of each individual instrument of national power is the seventh limitation to this study. In line with limitation five, limitation seven will focus the majority of analysis on the Department of Defense (DOD) and military instrument of national power in order to “challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS.” This limitation will allow the researcher to analyze the potential effects of military action and then determine how these effects may be used in conjunction with the remaining instruments to affect the desired end state in accordance with USG national security and policy. This limitation will allow the researcher to use the findings in order to provide conclusions and recommendations for future research, many of which may directly involve instruments of national power other than the military.

The first delimitation of this study is the role that the military can play with respect to achieving a strategic end state in the SCS in accordance with USG national security and policy. This delimitation bounds the researcher to the specifics of military action, or lack thereof, in order to determine whether a particular approach can be effective at challenging China’s militarization of its artificial islands. The second and final delimitation is regarding the potential for conflict because of a proposed military action. It is not the intent of the researcher to ultimately produce conclusions and recommendations that have a high likelihood of causing a conflict. Rather, the researcher will analyze military actions in an effort to answer the primary research question. Throughout the analysis, the researcher will deliberately reference risk as it pertains to any proposed military actions and the risk assessment will be used to determine whether the proposed action can effectively aid the USG in reaching a strategic end state. Finally,

due to aggregate classification levels, recent USN post-deployment reports are not available for use in this thesis. However, the lack of classified post-deployment reports does not affect the ability to gather significant research data. No research will be conducted after January 31, 2017 in order to allow sufficient time for analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter Conclusion

The next chapter, chapter 2, will contain the necessary literature analysis in order to provide context for answering the following secondary research questions:

1. With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?
2. What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?
3. What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?
4. What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?

The literature review will facilitate the answering of the secondary research questions and therefore aid in answering the primary research question, "Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?"

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

In order to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” a literature review is required. The literature review will allow the researcher to understand the body of work already gathered on the subject and make the appropriate analysis. This will consist of assessing the SCS strategic value, previous U.S. military actions, economic implications, operations in an A2/AD environment, reassuring our partners, and finally comparing the strategic guidance and policy of both the USG and China on the SCS. This information will be necessary to provide understanding as to how the SCS affects the Asia-Pacific region and aid in answering the primary and secondary research questions. The majority of the secondary research questions will be analyzed and answered in chapter 4 with the analysis of the literature review. However, the first of the secondary research questions addresses the overall concern of the USG regarding the SCS and will be answered here in chapter 2.

As the literature review progresses, there is a common thread that can be used to assist in understanding the significance the SCS brings to the Asia-Pacific region. This thread is the overall strategic value of the SCS itself and can provide the appropriate context to why the USG would seek to maintain the status quo in the region. By understanding this strategic value from multiple perspectives, the researcher will be able to assess the role of the USG, which ties directly to the first of the secondary research questions. With this question answered, the remainder of the information gathered during

the literature review can be applied towards the remaining secondary research questions and ultimately the primary research question.

South China Sea Strategic Value

To fully understand the strategic value of the SCS, it is necessary to view it through lenses of location and resources. A closer look at both can provide insight to the unresolved territorial disputes in the SCS and help to contextualize why China is going to such great efforts with their claims. This view also helps to add understanding to the secondary research question, “With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?” The disputes between nation-states in the SCS are not the main focus of this thesis, but rather the land reclamation and militarization efforts currently underway by China in areas such as the disputed Spratly Island chain. Figure 1 outlines the specific territorial disputes within the SCS. These territorial disputes have large implications for the nation-states involved and for the USG itself. According to a Congressional Research Service report from 2015, China’s claims in the SCS have “heightened concerns among observers that ongoing disputes over these waters and some of the islands within them could lead to a crisis or conflict between China and a neighboring country such as Japan, the Philippines, or Vietnam” (O’Rourke 2015, 28). More specifically, the USG could find itself involved in a crisis or conflict “as a result of obligations the United States has under bilateral security treaties with Japan and the Philippines” (O’Rourke 2015, 28). Additionally, President Obama makes reference to these disputes in the NSS “we remain alert to China’s military modernization and reject any role for intimidation in resolving territorial disputes” (Obama 2015, 1).

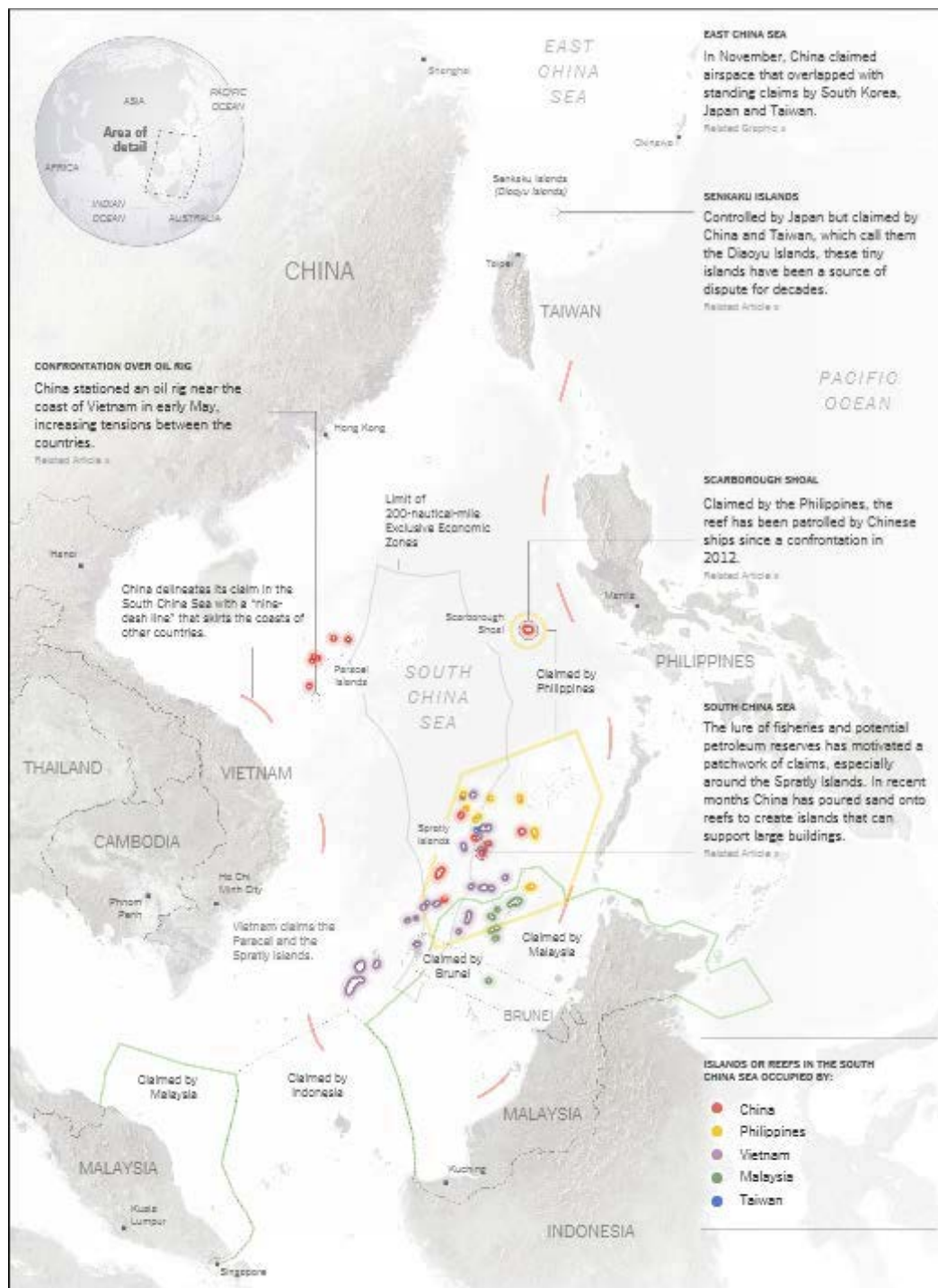


Figure 1. Map Showing Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

Source: Derek Watkins, "Territorial Disputes in the Waters Near China," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2014, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html>.

Figure 2 shows the SCS and its relation to other nations in the Asia-Pacific region. The geography of the area and its comparison to the territories in dispute is key to understanding the strategic value of the SCS.



Figure 2. Map of the SCS

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “South China Sea,” U.S. Department of Commerce, February 7, 2013, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.cfm?RegionTopicID=SCS>.

First, the location of the SCS and its access to major SLOCs make it a major economic hub and offers strategic military value. If the SCS can be controlled in its entirety by a single nation, then that nation would have a distinct relative advantage in the Asia-Pacific region. Control of the SCS would provide control of the SLOCs that links the Strait of Malacca to the majority of Asia and the western hemisphere. The SCS also provides an intrinsic military value to any nation-state able to control it, particularly China. If able to control the entire SCS, China would effectively be adding thousands of square miles to its territory. This would provide the opportunity for early warning, multiple layers of defense, and considering its land reclamation and militarization of artificial islands, a significant offensive capability. However, in order for a single nation-state to control a body of water the size of the SCS, it would require a monumental commitment of resources to sustain such an operation.

Second, the SCS is estimated to contain an abundance of natural resources such as oil and natural gas (EIA 2013). If the entire SCS is controlled by a single nation-state, then that nation-state could gain a monopoly on all resources found within it. This creates a natural tension among the surrounding nation-states of the SCS who also share competing claims within its boundaries. The most recent ruling by The Hague has not deterred China from building artificial islands (Perlez 2016, 1). This complicates the role of the USG due to established bilateral security treaties with Asia-Pacific partners. As China continues to make increasing claims, an anticipated monopoly on resources provides the potential for conflict between China and U.S. partners.

Third, the SCS provides multiple access points to areas of the most populated portion of the globe. China's militarization efforts continue to complicate the surrounding

nations-states' ability to operate freely within the global commons due to its A2/AD capabilities (O'Rourke 2015, 32). This is not to say that China actively prevents nation-states, including the USG, from accessing the SCS. However, the mere existence of these capabilities gives China the ability to actively deny military operations, or even the free-flow of trade at the time and date of their choosing (Kazianis 2014). If SLOCs through the SCS are restricted, it could require goods and services to be rerouted, which has the potential to upset the global economy due to increased shipping costs resulting from fuel expenditures and transit times. While China may view its actions militarily in the SCS as a way to assert control over its claims, the ultimate result may be far more damaging to its own economic interests. Economic implications will be covered in more detail later in this chapter.

Last, there are currently six nation-states with competing claims in the SCS. They include China, Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei (Watkins 2014). Further complicating the matter is China's 9-dash line claim that first appeared on a map circa 1947 (EIA 2013). Competing claims in the SCS have the potential to escalate to the point of hostilities, which would have an impact on global trade, and ultimately the global economy. The strategic value of the SCS holds a different set of priorities for each nation-state within the region and for nation-states elsewhere like the USG. The stability of the Asia-Pacific region is inherently tied to the stability of the SCS due to its strategic location, abundance of natural resources, and SLOCs. The combination of these factors highlight the strategic value of the SCS and gives context to the secondary research question, "With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern does the USG

have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS? The next section of the literature review will focus on previous U.S. military operations.

U.S. Military Operations

Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. has maintained a large number of military forces in the Asia-Pacific region (Haddick 2014, 20). In many ways, these forces have served as alert forces, ready to respond to all manner of crises. These crises have spanned from natural disasters to combat operations in Vietnam. The U.S. has also maintained a large presence in both Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in order to serve as a deterrent to North Korea. Additionally, Guam and Hawaii host a number of permanent personnel and provide strategic basing for the Asia-Pacific region. However, given the vast distances that must be covered in the Pacific, these forward deployed forces must contend with the challenges of operational reach in order to conduct operations in the SCS, especially when considering the A2/AD capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Haddick 2014, 48).

The U.S. military as an instrument of national power has many capabilities designed to project power and extend operational reach, which ultimately may be used to enforce the policy of the USG (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, I-1). Understanding the capabilities of the U.S. military will provide context to the secondary research question "What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?" Regarding the military instrument of national power, the means are the U.S. joint forces, which include the U.S. Army (USA), U.S. Navy (USN), U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), and the U.S. Air Force (USAF). When employed as a joint force,

the combined effects can provide the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) with an impressive set of capabilities.

Regarding the enforcement of the “international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS,” the researcher intends to reference the military as an instrument of national power as an available means. However, this does not remove the remaining instruments from being used to meet the same end. U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), the GCC for the Pacific AOR, has the ability to enforce UNCLOS by assigning a single or multiple portions of the joint forces. Since the primary research question asks specifically about military air and sea power to “challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS,” PACOM can use the service best suited to meet this goal. However, the researcher does not intend to discount the capabilities in accomplishing this objective beyond those of the USN and the USAF. U.S. ground forces within the USA and USMC can also bring capabilities to bear that can be used to “enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS” and will be considered by the researcher as force multipliers in any conclusions or recommendations for future research. Ultimately, it will be up to PACOM to determine the judicious use of military forces in order to provide the required air and sea power whose employment can serve to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?”

Economic Implications

In addition to the military instrument of national power, a sound understanding of the economics of the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the SCS, is key to answering both the first and second secondary research questions. An estimated \$5.3 trillion in goods

travels through the SCS each year, which not only affects the economy of China, but has the potential to affect the global economy as well (The Economist 2016). Since China's economy relies so much upon the trade that flows through the SCS, it is understandable why they may seek to control the entire region. However, as China continues to see growth in their own economy, any action to assert control over the region or to begin additional land reclamation on Scarborough Shoal, "which it wrested from the Philippines in 2012 after a stand-off between the two countries patrol boats" could see economic growth turn to decline (The Economist 2016). This potential for decline could come as a result of impacts to commercial shipping or offshore economic partners who view China's actions as simply bad for business. China however may be willing to take these risks because of the natural resources that exist in the SCS, and if it is able to control the entire region, this would give it unfettered access to those very resources.

Based upon reports of natural resource levels in the SCS by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, "the South China Sea contains approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proved and probable reserves" (EIA 2013). Because of the size of China's population size and economy, it has a enormous requirement for natural resources. These resources are used for the infrastructure of China itself, but also for its export manufacturing that it uses to drive its economy. Any reduction in import transit times of natural resources from areas such as the Middle East and Africa can translate to additional savings on costs and time of China's exports. When considered from this perspective, it becomes plausible as to why China would seek to legitimize its claim to disputed areas of the SCS. If China is successfully able to establish precedent over control of its artificial islands, it could then

claim overlapping EEZs which would effectively give it control over the area within its disputed nine-dash line claim (Haddick 2014, 18). Control over the area within China's nine-dash line claim essentially gives it control over the SCS, which allows it to monopolize exploitation of the resources available within it. This translates to shorter travel routes for oil and natural gas from the SCS to refineries in Mainland China, which can generate large savings in transport costs since China currently imports 85% of its oil and natural gas from the Arabian Gulf through the Strait of Malacca (Haddick 2014, 10). However, a single nation-state monopoly on the resources in the SCS has the potential to generate conflict between the other claimants in the region. The fact that China is militarizing its artificial islands raises its own set of economic implications. The size of the SCS and the distance from these islands to Mainland China requires an enormous commitment by China in order to sustain them. Further expansion on this idea can be found in chapter 4 but for now, this information is intended to highlight the importance of the SCS and add further context to the first secondary research question, "With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China's land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?"

Operations in an A2/AD Environment

In order to provide context for the secondary research question, "What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS," the facts of operating in such an environment must be analyzed. It is important to note that A2/AD is not a new concept. For as long as sea lay mines have existed, countries around the world have been able to use technologies such as these to deny access to a specific area. Then just as now, it relies upon the ability of those denying access to a

specific area to ensure that the threat associated with attempting to gain access outweighs the acceptable risk of doing so. However, for as long as there have been attempts to deny access, there have been efforts to find ways around those denial techniques. The U.S. military calls these efforts operations in an A2/AD environment and has decades of experience throughout multiple AORs. Denial techniques have graduated with time from things such as sea lay mines to more technologically advanced techniques like Surface-to-Air (S/A), Surface-to-Surface (S/S), Theater Ballistic Missile (TBM), Global Positioning System (GPS) denial, Ultra-High Frequency (UHF)/Very-High Frequency (VHF) denial, and data-link denial (Haddick 2014, 58).

U.S. joint forces have a unique knowledge base regarding operations in an A2/AD environment. China is not the first to develop a sophisticated A2/AD environment that poses a risk to routine U.S. military operations. Operations in the Arabian Gulf or the Black Sea present very similar, albeit less technologically advanced, A2/AD challenges to U.S. forces. As a matter of comparison, operations in bodies of water such as the Arabian Gulf or Black Sea pose a significant risk to U.S. forces just as when operating in the SCS. This risk is due to the S/A, S/S, and TBM capabilities within the nation-states of Russia, Syria, and Iran. One of the primary differences between operations in the Arabian Gulf, Black Sea, and SCS is the difference in size of the respective bodies of water. The Arabian Gulf is roughly one quarter the size of the SCS while the Black Sea is a little less than half the size of the SCS. Each of these bodies of water also only have one major entry and exit point that can be used to control access. Since the SCS has multiple entry and exit points and is without a naturally occurring choke point such as a strait, China has moved for a technological solution in the form of its A2/AD network. In order for U.S.

forces to operate within these regions, the challenge presented by first gaining access and then contending with the associated threats carries a commiserate level of risk. However, as the researcher will discuss in chapter 4, this should not dissuade the U.S. military from operating within the SCS, but rather serve to highlight the acceptable level of risk.

Reassuring Our Partners

U.S. military forces regularly deploy around the globe. These deployments serve multiple functions but one of the primary reasons is to reassure our partners and allies. As we consider the secondary question, “What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?” we can begin by considering the effects of continued presence around the world. Since the USG has a vested interest in maintaining the SLOCs through the SCS, it is natural that those interests would include the reassurance of our partners in the region. By its nature, the U.S. military has a unique role in regional partnerships that can range from humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, TSC exercises, and even the occasional FONOPS. According to the NSS of 2015, FONOPS and TSC exercises are generally viewed as a natural deterrent to aggression (Obama 2015, 13). They can be used to strategically message a nation either directly or indirectly by using the military as an instrument of national power. Generally speaking, both FONOPS and TSC exercises allow the U.S. military the opportunity to become familiar with a particular region, Host Nation (HN), or military partner (Obama 2015, 13). When considering the possibility of future operations in an area such as the SCS, HN partnerships and TSC also provide the added benefit of having pre-positioned support in a specified area. This can allow U.S. military forces to be present in an area where a formal basing does not yet exist. In the event of a conflict, this forward presence can be

used to conduct military operations and can lessen the burden of operational reach. Conflict aside, these partnerships and staging areas can provide an open door for other instruments of national power and aid the USG in achieving its strategic goals for the Asia-Pacific region. This information will be further expanded in chapter 4. HN partnerships and the stability of the region add further clarification to the first secondary research question, “With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?” and also to the third secondary research question, “What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?”

U.S. Policy in the SCS

The USG’s longstanding policy on the SCS is that it is part of the global commons. As such, a single nation-state has no legal claim to something intended for common use. This policy is also established throughout the international community and was reinforced by the most recent unanimous ruling by The Hague in favor of the Philippines (Perlez 2016, 1). Additionally, President Obama stated on April 9, 2015, “So our policy is not to fear China’s peaceful rise. Where we get concerned with China is where it is not necessarily abiding by international norms and rules, and is using its size and muscle to force countries into subordinate positions” (O’Rourke 2015, 62). It is this potential bullying in the SCS that gives the USG cause for concern. This is best stated by Admiral Harry Harris Jr., U.S. PACOM Commander, “Competing claims by several nations in the South China Sea increase the potential for miscalculation. But what’s really drawing a lot of concern in the here and now is the unprecedented land reclamation currently being conducted by China” (O’Rourke 2015, 61). Therefore, it can be surmised

that China's claim to the entire SCS (see figure 2), and their aggressive land reclamation efforts are being viewed internationally as a way to "bully" their way into control of the entire region.

Bearing in mind that the USG would prefer to settle all disputes within the SCS peacefully, current policy follows the statutes of established international law in accordance with UNCLOS. Since the end of the Second World War, the USG has strived to maintain peaceful relations in the global commons of the SCS; on occasion, the need for certain means in order to maintain these relations has been required. These means include the before mentioned FONOPS and TSC exercises. While not directly escalatory in nature, these means have the potential to invoke a reaction counter to the desired intent. When proposed, these means must undergo an appropriate risk assessment to determine whether they are the most effective way to maintain the status quo in the region.

China Policy in the SCS

China outlines its policy toward its interests in the SCS in its 2015 document titled, China's Military Strategy (CMS). The CMS combines matters of policy with specific military strategies for the way China views its methods for handling a variety of situations. China begins this document by stating, "the Chinese people aspire to join hands with the rest of the world to maintain peace, pursue development, and share prosperity" (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). The CMS then goes on to say that China will "oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion" (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). These views are a common trend throughout the document as China addresses its specific military strategies. What is of interest

throughout the document is the way China references its broader maritime claims with examples such as disputes with the Philippines that it views as an illegal occupation (Xinhua Agency 2015, 5). The document also references external countries that meddle in SCS affairs, which strongly implies the USG (Xinhua Agency 2015, 5). Implications such as this exist throughout the document and read, at least to the researcher, as a way to paint China in a favorable light despite its actions counter to its stated objectives.

China's construction and militarization of artificial islands within the EEZ of the Philippines along with its broader 9-dash line claim do not align with international law according to UNCLOS. China's statement that it will "unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development" seems to be not in line with its actions (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). Additionally, if China is not seeking expansionism or hegemonism as stated, then its claim to the majority of the SCS through the 9-dash line does not present a high level of transparency. China's actions in the SCS do however create tension and the potential for conflict. The most recent ruling of The Hague on the matter of sovereignty between the Philippines and China was found to be unanimously in favor of the Philippines (Perlez 2016, 1). This case serves to highlight the disparity between what China states, its actions, and what is determined to be acceptable by the international community. Further clarity and understanding can be gained through the comparison of U.S. policy and Chinese policy in the SCS.

Comparison of U.S. and Chinese Policy in the SCS

Having now discussed both the U.S. and Chinese policy in the SCS, it is helpful to make a comparison between the two in order to see the starkness of their contrasts. As previously stated, the U.S policy is one that sees the SCS as part of the global commons.

China however, by making increased territorial claims and its involvement in numerous territorial disputes, lacks the transparency it seeks to portray in documents such as its CMS. This presents the challenge for the USG and demonstrates the relevance behind the primary and secondary research questions, and ultimately the heart of this subject matter. China views itself as being in the right, the USG and international community disagree, and what remains is the level of involvement, military or other means, in order to maintain the status quo. By virtue of principle, the USG must avoid the ability for China to establish an international precedent through its actions in the SCS, lest other nations attempt to follow suit elsewhere. China's actions in the SCS are creating the potential for escalation and conflict instead of peaceful relations throughout the region. The USG, through its policy and bilateral partnerships in the region is in a position to challenge China's land reclamation and militarization efforts. The determination yet to be made is the level of strategic capital the USG is willing to expend based upon other strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific region. Almost any decision can affect U.S. national security and policy. This also provides necessary context to the primary research question, "Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?"

U.S. National Security Effects

The combination of instability in the SCS, threat to the free-flow of trade on SLOCs, and the impact on the global economy directly affect the national security of the U.S. Senior officials within the USG recognize these effects and this underscores why the USG now places more emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region. Any type of conflict in a major area of the world such as the Asia-Pacific region can create instability within the

global economy. Since the economies of the U.S. and China are so intertwined, it is in the best interest of the USG and China to ensure that whatever disputes occur in the SCS are done so peacefully. Should any type of conflict arise, the USG would have to consider the risk to other strategic objectives by involving itself. Therefore, if it is in the best interest of the USG and the appropriate strategic weight has been applied to developing a response, then an operational approach can be developed to address the issue.

Moving Forward: The Operational Approach

As the strategic problem within the SCS continues to take shape, so must the way forward. By developing an operational approach to the situation in the SCS, “the commander’s visualization of how the operation should transform current conditions into the desired end state” will assist in providing the way forward (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-5). Once an operational approach is developed it can then be used to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” Since the primary research question references the military instrument of national power, the operational approach will focus on this instrument in order to achieve the desired end state in accordance with national security and policy. Once the operational approach has been developed and analyzed using evaluation criteria, the primary research question can be answered. The researcher accepts the possibility that even though the primary research question references the military instrument of national power, the answer may reveal the need for additional instruments to “challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS.”

The operational approach developed to answer the primary research question will require multiple lines of effort (LOEs). An LOE “links multiple tasks and missions using

the logic of purpose – cause and effect – to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-28). As these LOEs begin to take shape, it is the intent of the researcher to use them to inform the best operational approach in order to answer the primary research question. Chapter 3 will discuss the benefits of the proposed operational approach to this study and chapter 4 will present the researcher’s proposed operational approach itself.

Chapter Conclusion

The literature review provides a strong contextual baseline for the secondary research questions. During the course of this chapter, appropriate context was given to the first of the secondary research questions, “With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?” Based upon the information gathered throughout the literature review, the USG should be concerned about the combined effects of China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS because of the impact on the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and the impact to the stability of the global economy. The remainder of the secondary research questions will be presented and answered throughout the course of chapter 4. The next chapter, chapter 3, will detail the research methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

In order to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” as well as the secondary research questions, it is necessary to use a variety of methods. Those methods include a literature review, the development of an operational approach, and the application of specific evaluation criteria. By compiling this information, the secondary research questions and ultimately the primary research question will be answered. The research begins with the analysis of the existing body of knowledge by way of the literature review. As discussed last chapter, the specifics regarding whether the USG should challenge the militarization of artificial islands using military air and sea power must be considered by reviewing the existing literature on the subject. Throughout the course of chapter 2, specific context was given to the secondary research questions. The first secondary research question was answered in chapter 2 and the remaining secondary research questions will be answered using the results of the literature review in chapter 4. Following this, a proposed operational approach will be developed based upon the answers gained from the secondary research questions and by applying specific evaluation criteria. The overall results of the operational approach and the answer to the primary research question will allow the researcher to draw conclusions and recommend a direction for future research on the subject.

Operational Approach

Upon completion of the literature review, a proposed operational approach must be developed that will aid in determining how the USG can use the military as an instrument of national power in the SCS. The proposed operational approach and its desired end state can be used to “provide a unifying purpose around which actions and resources are focused” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, I-1). An operational approach is an efficient way to define objectives that can be accomplished or describe the broad actions to be used to achieve the desired end state rather than a set of specific and detailed chronological requirements (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-5). The specifics of the operational approach will contain LOEs on FONOPS Air, FONOPS Sea, TSC, and Information Operations (IO). Additionally, the researcher will use comparisons between other bodies of water throughout the world and the SCS to make comparisons on how operations within them relate. Joint Publication 5-0 contains multiple depictions of how the operational approach can be greatly enhanced by the use of visual aids. Figure 3 will serve as the blank template for the operational approach used in this study. As the material is presented using this template, it will help the reader gain a better understanding of how the current conditions may be influenced by LOEs and how those LOEs can influence the ultimate end state.

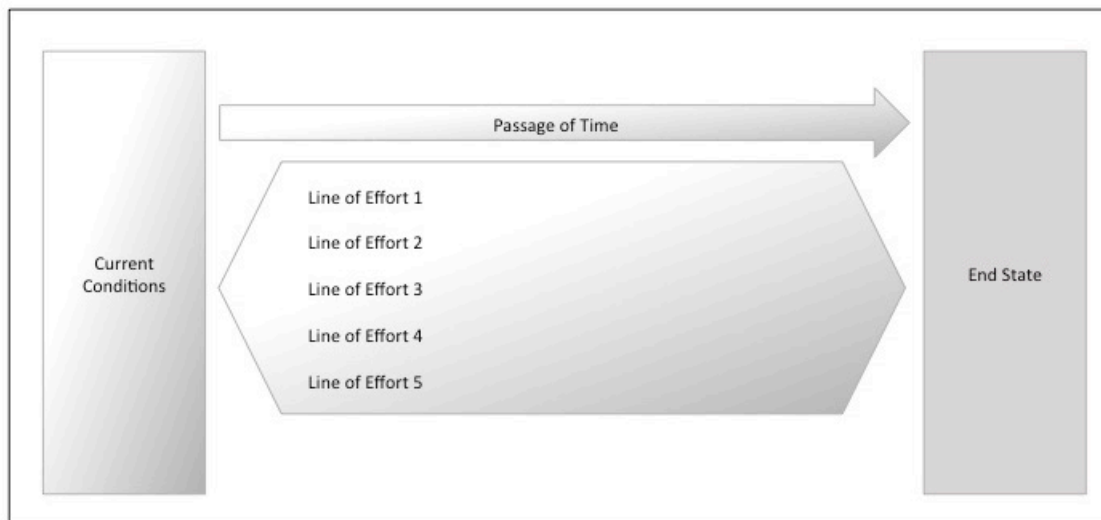


Figure 3. Operational Approach – Generic

Source: Adopted from Jack D. Kem, *Planning for Action: Campaign Concepts and Tools* (Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2012).

Within this generic operational approach framework, tasks will be linked “using the logic of purpose – cause and effect – to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-28). As the LOEs are developed and placed into the operational approach graphic shown above, the desired end state can then be achieved. In order to add further clarity to these LOEs, comparisons can be made between operations in the SCS and operations in similar bodies of water elsewhere around the globe. These comparisons will aid in making the connection between the current conditions and the desired end state. Finally, each LOE will require a set of specific tasks in order to illustrate how their completion will assist in achieving the desired end state. These tasks will be unique to each LOE and will be derived from past and present military operations that have taken place under similar conditions.

Evaluation Criteria

In order to determine the best line of effort based upon the risk level, each must be analyzed using a specific set of evaluation criteria. This is necessary because all LOEs may assist in achieving the desired end state, but not all may meet acceptable risk levels. The challenge is finding the best LOE(s) based upon those evaluated. According to JP 5-0, a course of action should be both “feasible and acceptable” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-15). For the purposes of this thesis, the researcher will use this criterion that is normally reserved for evaluating courses of action, to evaluate the selected lines of effort. The researcher will also impose the additional requirements of suitability and sustainability to any proposed line of effort. When applying these requirements within the evaluation criteria, it will assist the researcher in determining the best LOE(s) to achieve the desired end state. The best LOE(s) will have the highest overall measure of feasibility, suitability, acceptability, and sustainability. However, even though a LOE scores a high measure within these categories, risk will be the final determinant of whether a LOE can successfully aid in moving from current conditions to the desired end state.

“Feasible” as used in the evaluation criteria indicates that a particular line of effort is “capable of being done or carried out” (Merriam-Webster 2017). In other words, a feasible line of effort as proposed in this thesis is one that is possible and can be acted upon. “Suitable” will be used to indicate a line of effort that is “adapted to a use or purpose” (Merriam-Webster 2107). When applying suitability to the evaluation criteria, the researcher will be assessing if the proposed line of effort is applicable in achieving the desired end state. “Acceptable” will be used to determine whether or not a line of

effort is able to “balance cost and risk with the advantage gained” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, IV-24). Finally, “sustainable” will be used as a measure to determine whether a valid line of effort is possible based upon the resources required to complete it.

The evaluation criteria for this thesis will be used to determine which of the proposed LOEs in the operational approach will be the most feasible, suitable, acceptable, and sustainable. Table 1 depicts each of these four values and assigns a point value ranging from one point to three points. The criterion assigned to the point system is based upon the assessed measure of effectiveness with one point for “Least Effective” two points for “Somewhat Effective” and three points for “Most Effective.” chapter 4 will see each LOE assessed on an individual basis and then aggregate the results. The totals will then be discussed in chapter 5 and used to provide a recommendation.

Table 1. LOE Evaluation Criteria			
Question	Least Effective (1 point)	Somewhat Effective (2 points)	Most Effective (3 points)
1) Is the LOE feasible?			
2) Is the LOE suitable?			
3) Is the LOE acceptable?			
4) Is the LOE sustainable?			

Source: Developed by author.

The four criteria chosen to evaluate the respective LOEs represent the criteria used to determine which of them is most effective. As the criterion is then applied to the research, a judgment is necessary by the researcher to determine where on the table the measure of effectiveness should fall. Each of these judgments must be defended so that

the appropriate levels of points are assigned to the respective LOEs: least effective (one point), somewhat effective (two points), and most effective (three points). After all LOEs have been analyzed using the point system in table 1, the results will be tallied and the LOE with the highest score will indicate the highest measure of effectiveness in accomplishing the desired end state. In the event that more than one LOE has the same or similar scores, then both LOEs will be considered as primary contributors to the desired end state. This approach will serve to highlight the potentially least effective LOE compared to others determined to be more effective. Chapter 4 will discuss these results as they are applied to aid in answering the primary research question.

Research Methodology

The following is a list of the steps that will be used for the research in this thesis:

Step 1: The first step of the research methodology is to conduct a literature review to answer the question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the artificial islands in the South China Sea? This literature review will be conducted in chapter 2.

Step 2: The second step of the research methodology is to use the results of the literature review to answer the secondary research questions:

1. With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?
2. What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?

3. What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?
4. What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?

Step 3: The third step of the research methodology is to develop an operational approach including multiple LOEs after analyzing them using the evaluation criteria within table 1.

Step 4: The fourth step in the research methodology is to tally the results of the findings once the evaluation criteria have been applied. Once combined with the operational approach, this will provide the answer to the primary research question.

Step 5: Finally, the last step in the research methodology is to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research.

Threats to Validity and Biases

There are several threats to the validity of this research as well as some areas of bias regarding the research. Concerning validity, the researcher may attempt to use information from sources in the incorrect context, which may lead the reader to draw an incorrect conclusion. Validity is also potentially at risk when the researcher makes comparisons between military operations elsewhere in the world and those in the SCS. Attempting to draw comparisons between bodies of water such as the Arabian Gulf and SCS without addressing the differences between the two could cause the researcher to draw linkages where they may not necessarily apply.

Biases also threaten the validity of this thesis. Given the researcher's experience in military operations and previous study, there could be a subconscious draw towards a

predetermined solution. This could cause a bias in the answers found for both the primary and secondary research questions. The best preventative measure in combatting these threats to validity and biases is for the researcher to acknowledge them and attempt to remain objective moving forward. This will help to avoid any predisposed conclusions or preconceived notions on the correct answer, course of action, or end state.

Chapter Conclusion

The goal of the researcher with this methodology is to conduct the most thorough and correct analysis of the primary research question while being cognizant of the limitations, delimitations, threats to validity, and biases. The methodical process of answering the secondary research questions, developing an operational approach, and then applying the evaluation criteria listed in table 1 will result in answering the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea?” The next chapter, chapter 4, will provide the results of the literature review, answers to the remaining secondary research questions, and an analysis of the data obtained as a result of the evaluation criteria.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Chapter Introduction

This chapter will present all data collected, as a part of this study in order to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the artificial islands in the South China Sea?” The literature review will serve to answer the secondary research questions whose answers will ultimately aid in answering the primary research question. As discussed in chapter 3, the results of the literature review, answers to secondary research questions, and evaluation criteria will be analyzed using a five-step process. The first step will be the results of the literature review.

Step 1: Results of the Literature Review

During the course of the literature review, the first of the secondary research questions, “With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?” was answered. The USG should be concerned about the combined effects of China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS because of the impact on the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and the impact to the stability of the global economy. China’s actions in the SCS threaten to draw the USG into a potential conflict in order to support existing bilateral partnerships with neighboring nations, namely Japan and the Philippines (O’Rourke 2015, 28). The USG’s commitment to these partnerships and the potentially damaging effects on the global economy are the primary reasons why the USG should be

concerned even though they have no territorial claims in the region (O'Rourke 2015, 28). The USG has maintained a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region since the end of World War II and any Chinese hegemonic tendencies threaten to upset the balance of the established order (O'Rourke 2015, 32). Even though China's actions in the SCS are counter to its statements about hegemonism and expansionism, it is in the best interest of the USG to maintain the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region in order to ensure that this established order remains intact (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). With the first of the secondary research questions answered and the USG justified in maintaining the balance in the Asia-Pacific region, the remaining secondary research questions can be analyzed using the literature review so that they may also be answered.

The next secondary research question, "What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?" requires an explanation of what the legal requirements are before the question can be answered. According to UNCLOS Article 3, "every state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles (see figure 4) (United Nations 1982, 27).

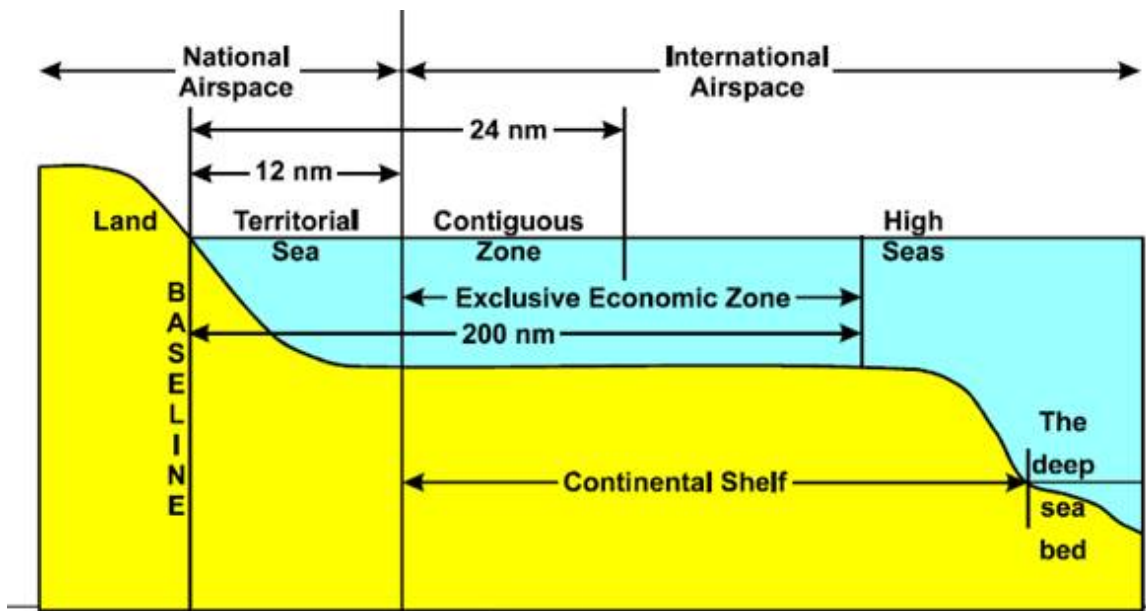


Figure 4. UNCLOS recognized boundaries.

Source: Parliament of Australia, “Chapter 3 Jurisdiction at sea: international law and domestic law,” House of Representatives Committees, January 12, 2016, accessed January 13, 2017, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_representatives_Committees?url=spla/crimes%20at%20sea/report/chapter3.htm.

The most important thing to note from figure 4 is the size of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles. According to Article 60 of UNCLOS, a sovereign state’s EEZ affords it many advantages with respect to the resources found within it. Since the purpose of this thesis is to answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea?” the most relevant portion of UNCLOS Article 60 is the information provided about artificial islands. UNCLOS Article 60 states that, “in the exclusive economic zone, the coastal State shall have the exclusive right to

construct and to authorize and regulate the construction, operation and use of artificial islands” (United Nations 1982, 45).

China’s construction of artificial islands in the Spratly Island chain within the EEZ of the Philippines was the catalyst for the arbitration that resulted in the most recent unanimous ruling by The Hague in the Philippines’ favor (Perlez 2016, 1). This is an important distinction to make. If China had been constructing and militarizing artificial islands in their own EEZ, then they would have been well within their rights according to UNCLOS. However, in this case, China has attempted to establish a broader claim by its unsubstantiated “9 dash line” claim through the construction of artificial islands in an attempt to establish control over territory that is not legally its own. Therefore, since China shows no signs of halting its construction of artificial islands in disputed territory, and in accordance with the first of the secondary research questions, “With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?” the appropriate context is given to the next secondary research question, “What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?”

Since it has been established that the USG should be concerned about the combined effects of China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS because of the impact on the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and the impact to the stability of the global economy, it follows that the USG should enforce the legal requirements of UNCLOS. As mentioned in chapter 2, the instruments of national power, diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, provide several options to the USG regarding specific means. However, the focus of this thesis will reference the military as

the primary instrument of national power due to the specific nature of China's militarization efforts of its artificial islands. Additionally, it is worth noting that the selection of the military as an instrument of national power can still provide sound effects across the spectrum to diplomatic, informational, and economic efforts. Therefore, the best set of military means must be selected that will be the most effective at enforcing the legal requirements of UNCLOS.

UNCLOS, being a unique legal document, deals primarily with matters regarding maritime and airspace affairs. The USG finds itself in a unique position when it comes to enforcing the legal requirements within this document. This is because the USG is itself not a signatory of UNCLOS but still uses its military to enforce certain aspects of it. There is an ongoing debate as to why the USG has not ratified UNCLOS with the majority of reasons stemming from a diminished USG sovereignty and subjection to international tribunals. These ideas are outside the scope of this thesis and the researcher acknowledges the complications to recommendations as a result. What remains however is an international expectation, based upon status quo, for the USG to continually exert itself in order to uphold international legal standards regarding maritime and airspace sovereignty. Were these actions to cease, it would open the door for similar cases in other areas of the global commons due to the precedent set by China in the SCS. This aside, in order to move forward with the research of this thesis, it must be understood that even though the USG is not a signatory of UNCLOS, it does not change the fact that the military as an instrument of national power will be considered as means to challenge China's militarization of the artificial islands they are constructing.

As the U.S. joint forces are evaluated in order to find the best means to enforce the legal requirements of UNCLOS, a logical method would be to consider which of them could best perform this mission. Since airspace is involved, the two choices for enforcing sovereign airspace matters would be the USAF and the USN due to each having access to both large and small fixed wing aircraft. Rotary wing aircraft could also be used to fulfill the mission of enforcing international airspace but slower speeds and greater travel requirements make them less desirable than fixed wing assets. Next, the task of enforcing the global commons against China's excessive maritime claims would naturally fall to the USN. The USN is the naval service within the U.S. joint forces with the ships capable of performing such a mission. The USN also has the unique capability of performing both airspace and maritime enforcement simultaneously with Naval Aviation assets launched from aircraft carriers. Therefore, the best options of those available to enforce the legal requirements of UNCLOS are the USAF and USN based upon the capabilities of each service.

Having now identified the means of enforcing the legal requirements of UNCLOS, what follows is the appropriate method. Any time the military instrument of national power is considered or used in order to "enforce" a policy or convention such as UNCLOS; it must be done so with caution. Otherwise, the potential for unintended escalation is increased. Escalation in and of itself is always a concern that should be addressed when planning the best method to use military assets. In order to accomplish the task at hand, any military options should be selected based upon the ability to provide an effective yet measured response. When dealing with an issue of enforcement at the international level, the strategic messaging based upon any military action must meet the

desired intent. With this in mind, the mission of “enforcing the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS” regarding China’s artificial islands in the SCS requires a simple and effective approach. FONOPS provides a simple and effective method of enforcing both airspace and maritime claims in accordance with UNCLOS. Sea FONOPS can be accomplished by simply sailing a USN vessel within close proximity of China’s artificial islands, specifically inside 12 nautical miles. Since there is no legal basis for China’s claim to the reclaimed land on which these islands are built because they are inside the EEZ of the Philippines, the legal requirement to remain outside of 12 nautical miles does not apply. Air FONOPS can be conducted in a similar fashion. Since the same legal guideline of 12 nautical miles applies to territorial airspace as it does to territorial waters, an aircraft can accomplish the same goal as a ship. This aircraft could be either a USAF or USN aircraft. By combining effects, coordinated FONOPS could be conducted simultaneously with USAF aircraft and USN vessels, or potentially even USN vessels and aircraft from the same Carrier Strike Group (CSG). The fact that military assets are used in order to conduct FONOPS sends a much more potent message strategically compared to civilian shipping and aircraft. Therefore, if the threat of escalation is sufficiently accounted for, it can be surmised that using FONOPS as the method and the USN and USAF as the means to enforce UNCLOS, the secondary question, “What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?” is answered.

Now that it has been established that the USN and USAF are the means to enforce the legal requirements of UNCLOS, the risks of the operating environment must be discussed. The next secondary research question addresses this problem directly, “What

impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?" The efforts underway by China in the SCS are an extension of their already highly modernized network of S/A, S/S, and TBM capabilities (Haddick 2014, 89). By constructing artificial islands in the SCS, China has the potential to extend their coverage of A2/AD capabilities (see figure 5).

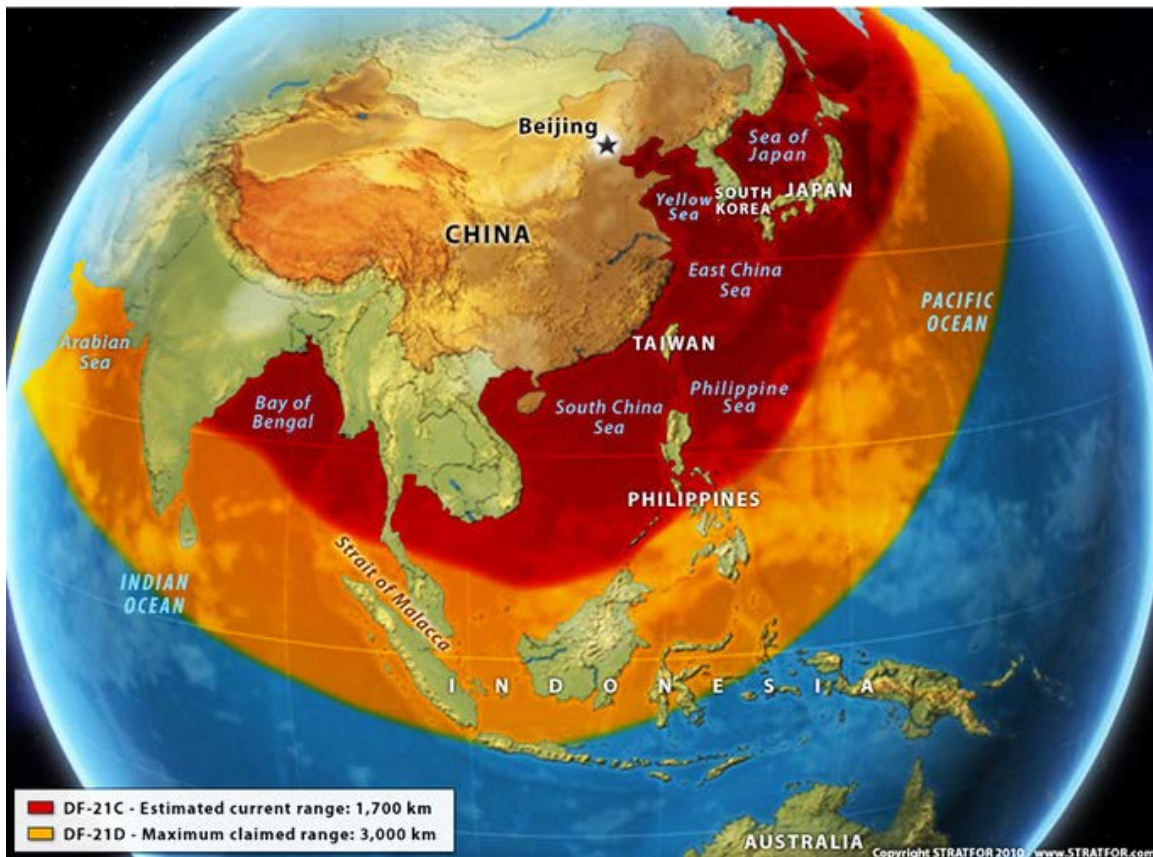


Figure 5. China's A2/AD Capability

Source: Center for International Maritime Security, "A Proposed Framework for Analysis of Chinese Naval Modernization," Strategic Outlook, June 8, 2012, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://cimsec.org/a-proposed-framework-for-analysis-of-chinese-naval-modernization/1090>.

The A2/AD capability shown in figure 5 shows how a single weapon, the DF-21, placed on the Chinese mainland can be used to deny access to a large geographical area. Now imagine the same weapon system being placed on an artificial island in the SCS and how much further the resulting range of that weapon would increase. But, even though China possesses long-range weapons such as the DF-21, of equal concern are China's shorter range S/A, and S/S threat capabilities. These weapon systems would pose the greatest risk to U.S. forces, namely the USN and USAF, as they conducted Sea and Air FONOPS around China's artificial islands in the SCS based upon reduced reaction times and the sheer number in China's inventory.

However, in order to fully address the secondary research question, "What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?" the necessary context must be given to U.S. military operations in similar environments elsewhere in the world. When thinking about the SCS, it is helpful to imagine other bodies of water in the world with similar characteristics where U.S. joint forces routinely operate. The Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, and Arabian Gulf can all be used to draw comparisons to the SCS. Each have geographically constrained choke points, share borders with multiple countries, and contain numerous commercial shipping routes. For the purposes of this study, the specific focus will be on the similarities between U.S. military operations in the Arabian Gulf and those in the SCS.

The Arabian Gulf has several similarities and differences compared to those in the SCS; these can initially be seen in figure 6. The fact that Iran poses a lethal threat capability to U.S. forces operating in the Arabian Gulf must be assessed against the acceptable level of risk of those operations. Just like the SCS, the Arabian Gulf presents

problems for U.S. forces because of Iran's S/A, S/S, and TBM threat capabilities. The Arabian Gulf also presents a challenge to the USN and USAF due to its single entry and exit point, the Strait of Hormuz through which naval and air assets must be funneled. This is key because the rules for commercial air traffic do not apply to military aircraft. Military aircraft, by nature of their operation in the global commons without a specific planned air-traffic route, must adhere to international airspace unless specifically granted overflight rights by a nation-state. The transit of this strait presents a high risk to USN aircraft and vessels, and USAF aircraft from Iranian S/A, S/S, and TBM threats. However, the negative strategic implications of the USG choosing not to operate inside the Arabian Gulf because of these threats can be viewed as greater than the risk in doing so. Since the USG accepts the risks to military forces associated with operating inside the Arabian Gulf, trade continues to flow freely on open SLOCs while international partnerships are maintained. When comparing these goals to those of the SCS, it is possible to make a correlation.



Figure 6. Iran's A2/AD Capability

Source: STRATFOR, "Iran, Military Posturing and a Missile Test," Strategic Forecasting, July 9, 2008, accessed January 14, 2017, <https://www.stratfor.com/search/site/shahab-3>.

As depicted in figure 6, the threat posed by Iran's A2/AD network and Shahab-3 missile have not decreased U.S. military operations in the Arabian Gulf. Operations in the region continue on a routine basis even though forces are under the umbrella of Iranian S/A, S/S, and TBM threats. Additionally, Iran's geographical location with respect to the single entry and exit point, the Strait of Hormuz, presents a high level of risk to USN vessels transiting into or out of the Arabian Gulf. However, the strategic risk to SLOCs, commercial shipping, and regional partnerships are greater than the potential risk to the

USN or U.S. military forces as a whole. By taking the same approach with operations in the SCS, it can be concluded that a similar risk exists to U.S. military forces in the SCS as those faced within the Arabian Gulf. The differences between the two bodies of water lie firstly in their relative size. The SCS is roughly four times larger than that of the Arabian Gulf and it also has multiple entry and exit points. China's A2/AD network in the SCS, while technologically more advanced than that of Iran, does not pose any additional threat to the U.S. military, other than its size and scope, than those already faced in the Arabian Gulf. The greater ranges of coverage of China's S/A, S/S, and TBM threat systems make up for the larger size of the SCS compared to the Arabian Gulf, but this also affords U.S. forces additional room for maneuver since they are not constrained within a confined area. Therefore, when considering the effects of China's advanced A2/AD network, the secondary question, "What impact does China's advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?" is answered.

The final secondary research question, "What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?" follows logically after the answer to the previous three secondary research questions. It has been established that the USG should be concerned with China's actions in the SCS, and that FONOPS by air and sea should be the appropriate means and method to enforce UNCLOS, and that China's advanced A2/AD network should not dissuade U.S. joint forces from operations in the region. Therefore, since the USG will be using the military instrument of national power to operate in the region, it follows that there must be some way that the USG can assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) exercises as discussed in chapter 2, are an excellent way to strategically message a nation and increase populous support for U.S. joint forces as they operate in the Asia-Pacific region. TSC exercises provide access to the nations with which they are being conducted in addition to establishing strong working relationships between the respective militaries and governments. TSC, while typically performed between the U.S. military and HN militaries are not limited solely to military operations. Missions such as humanitarian aid and disaster response can be used to bolster host nation support of U.S. joint forces and lay the groundwork for future partnerships.

From a strategic perspective, TSC exercises also provide the USG the opportunity to message nations in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly China, to show that the USG is willing to maintain its partnerships and can be expected to have a continual presence in the region. This presence also provides the catalyst for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) to establish working relationships with the HN. From an operational perspective, TSC exercises provide the U.S. military an opportunity to become more familiar with the operating environment, the HN military, and eases the burden of operational reach by allowing access to strategic basing sites. These sites can be used in the event of a potential conflict and shorten the distance between current U.S. bases in the Asia-Pacific region. Considering these benefits, it becomes clear that TSC exercises open the door for the USG to conduct a wide level of assistance to any HN(s) they are engaged with. By using the military instrument of national power to conduct TSC exercises with HNs in the Asia-Pacific region, the USG gains an opportunity to use the remaining instruments where the ability to do so may not

have been readily available. The USG can then begin to conduct a whole of government approach, which can ultimately benefit the interests of the HN, the USG, and positively affect the stability of the region. Therefore, the final secondary research question, “What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?” is answered.

Step 2: Consolidated Answers to Secondary Research Questions

Now that the secondary research questions have been answered using the results of the literature review, they will be consolidated here. This consolidation will ultimately aid the reader in understanding how the results help answer the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea?”

1. With no territorial claims in the region, what cause for concern should the USG have regarding China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS?

Answer: The USG should be concerned about the combined effects of China’s land reclamation and militarization efforts in the SCS because of the impact on the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and the impact to the stability of the global economy.

2. What means does the USG have available to enforce the international legal requirements set forth in UNCLOS?

Answer: FONOPS by air and sea using the USN and USAF should be used to enforce the legal requirements of UNCLOS.

3. What impact does China’s advanced A2/AD network have on U.S. joint force operations in the SCS?

Answer: China's A2/AD network in the SCS does not pose any additional risk, other than its size and scope, to U.S. joint forces, particularly the USN and USAF, then those already faced elsewhere in the world.

4. What options exist in order to assist and reassure our partners in the Asia-Pacific region?

Answer: TSC exercises open the door for increased access to HN military and government interaction, which aid in maintaining a steady presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The above answers to the secondary questions yield important information that can be used to develop the proposed operational approach, which will be discussed next.

Step 3: Proposed Operational Approach

The third step of the research methodology is to assemble a proposed operational approach using the answers to the secondary research questions in order to develop LOEs. These LOEs will be input into the blank operational approach template discussed previously in chapter 3 (see figure 3). As a result of the secondary research question answers, it will be necessary to develop four LOEs with resulting tasks in order to show the progression from the current conditions to the desired end state. The left side of the operational approach references the current conditions and the right side describes the end state, which describes the strategic goal for the USG. The center portion of the operational approach contains the individual LOEs, which will be used as the vehicles to move from the current conditions to the desired end state. Across the top is the selected timeline, which was chosen as the best solution in order for the LOEs to take effect. See figure 7 for more details.

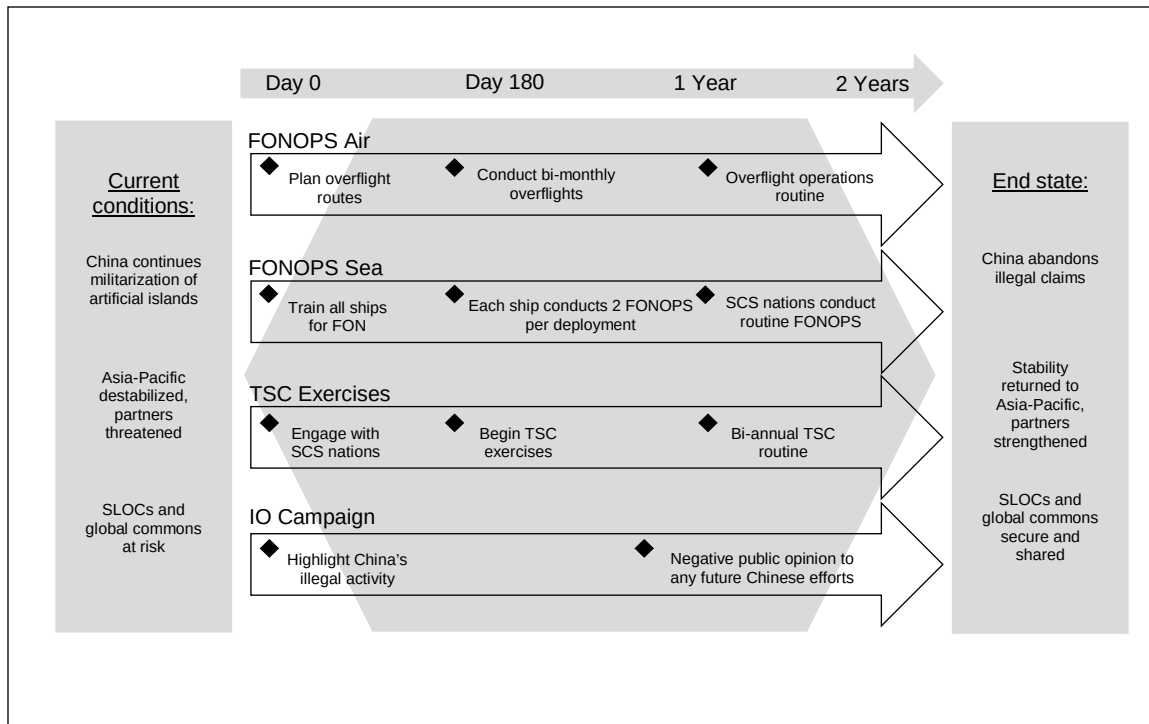


Figure 7. Operational Approach – Challenge to China’s militarization of SCS

Source: Developed by author.

With the operational approach template filled in, it is worth discussing the specifics of how each portion ultimately assists in achieving the desired end state. As shown in figure 7, the current conditions reference China’s current actions and the second and third order effects of those actions. Also, the four LOEs of FONOPS Air, FONOPS Sea, TSC Exercises, and IO Campaign were chosen in order to achieve the desired end state. This desired end state is focused on reversing the course of the current conditions in the SCS and presenting a favorable outcome. The timeline of zero days up to two years was chosen as a realistic period of time for the LOEs to be implemented and to give them time to take the appropriate effect. Finally, each LOE has a series of tasks that were specifically chosen in order to use the “logic of purpose – cause and effect – to focus

efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011, III-28). These tasks will be discussed next.

FONOPS Air as an LOE requires significant preparation before actually being conducted. It is not the intent of the researcher to diminish this preparation by the tasks listed within the operational approach. The first task of “plan overflight routes” requires careful coordination in accordance with published instrument flight rules and airways navigation so that chances of mid-air collision are avoided with any civilian air traffic. However, once complete, the act of conducting FONOPS by air is relatively simple. Military aircraft may simply overfly the artificial islands in question while monitoring the UHF Guard frequency of 243.0MHz. If any query is made to the aircraft, the response should be made in accordance with established standard operating procedures. An example of a standard response would be “I am a U.S. military aircraft operating within international airspace in accordance with international law.” This type of response in the Spratly area of the SCS for example, reinforces the fact that there is no legal claim to a right of territorial airspace over a Chinese artificial island that has been built within the EEZ of the Philippines. As an LOE, FONOPS Air can be routinely conducted once the appropriate flight routes have been planned and the standard responses to queries have been developed. As shown on the operational approach in figure 7, the follow-on tasks for FONOPS Air can begin within a few months of planning completion and continue on a routine basis.

The LOE of FONOPS Sea also requires extensive planning before it can be conducted. This planning begins with the initial task listed within the LOE by providing training to all ships on conducting FONOPS, which is not a skillset exercised very often.

Just as when planning a route of flight by air, a Plan of Intended Movement (PIM) by sea must take into account merchant shipping lanes, and the territorial seas of any surrounding nations. Again, since the action being taken is against a Chinese artificial island in the Spratly island chain within the EEZ of the Philippines, the surrounding sea has no associated territory and there need not be concern over sovereignty. For a USN ship conducting FONOPS in close proximity to a Chinese artificial island, the appropriate maritime channel, channel 16, should be monitored for any response to queries should they be required. Similar to the standard response example given for FONOPS Air, FONOPS Sea should have an established and standardized response. An example of an appropriate maritime response to any issued challenge while sailing near a Chinese artificial island in the SCS would be, “I am a U.S. Navy vessel operating within international waters in accordance with international law.” Like with FONOPS Air, this type of response reinforces the fact that China has no claim to territorial seas around the islands that they have constructed. As an LOE, FONOPS Sea has the ability to be conducted rapidly once the standard procedures are established, which is shown by follow-on tasks in figure 7. Every USN vessel operating within the Asia-Pacific AOR is capable of conducting FONOPS Sea and as more vessels train for them prior to deployment, the ease of conducting the mission should increase its routine nature.

The third LOE for TSC exercises allows for a more persistent presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Given that the USG has no claims in the region, Asia-Pacific nations may be more likely to seek opportunities to work and partner with the U.S. military. This understanding logically gives way to the first task of engaging with nearby nations in the SCS, which can translate into cooperative TSC exercises that allow the U.S military to

become more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of HN militaries. In fact, the cumulative results of TSC exercises cannot be overstated. TSC exercises provide access to Asia-Pacific nations that may not have granted access to U.S. forces in the past. Once access is granted, this provides an opportunity to assess the HN infrastructure such as airfields, ports, bridges, roads, etc. This assessment is key for the U.S. military in order to understand the strategic and operational capabilities and limitations of the HN to conduct or aid in multi-national (MN) military operations. If any infrastructure is found to be lacking in its ability to support MN operations, this presents an opportunity for the USG to strengthen ties with the HN in question by offering to help improve said infrastructure. This will benefit the HN and thereby benefit U.S. forces during TSC exercises and in the event that potential combat operations are necessary. TSC exercises also have the benefit of increasing the proficiency of the HN military and can be used to strategically message China as the frequency of their occurrence increases. Depicted in figure 7, the follow-on tasks within the LOE can be used to schedule a routine set of TSC exercises within the SCS that can occur on a bi-annual basis.

The final LOE is one that can be conducted in conjunction with any of the previous LOEs. As the first task within the LOE specifies, highlighting China's illegal activity in the SCS as part of an IO campaign can be used in order to influence public opinion about China's actions. Broadcasting the fact that USG is conducting FONOPS by air and by sea can be used to build support among Asia-Pacific nations. This support can be then translated into partnerships that result in TSC exercises. Then, as TSC exercises are being conducted, additional IO campaigns can be run that highlight HN and U.S. military partnerships. Highlighting partnerships and exercises serve the purpose of

sending strategic messages to China. These can serve as a condemnation to Chinese actions in the SCS, which dual as fulfilling the follow-on tasks within the LOE and increasing a HN's confidence in its abilities to continue FONOPS air and sea on its own. However, the implementation of this LOE must be carefully managed so that it does not negate other potentially broader strategic goals in the region. If China were being engaged as a working partner on a regional stability issue such as North Korea, a more metered IO campaign addressing international legality would be more beneficial than to strongly condemn China's actions. As an LOE, an IO campaign can be dialed up or down at any time depending on the desired result but it is the integration within the larger strategic goal that make it an effective and viable option.

A single LOE may have the potential to bring about the desired end state in the SCS. However, the combined effects of multiple LOEs may prove to produce a more desirable result. In order to determine whether the focus of the operational approach should be toward a single LOE or multiple LOEs, each must be assessed using the evaluation criteria from table 1. Each LOE will be assessed based on four criteria, feasibility, acceptability, suitability, and sustainability. In an effort to avoid confusion, the evaluation criteria outlined here is not intended to be used to compare courses of action but rather to aid in selecting the most effective LOE(s) that will lead to achieving the desired end state. The four evaluation criteria will be used to assess each LOE individually and once complete, the results will be aggregated. When an LOE is assigned a score based upon the criteria, the researcher will justify the rationale for the score provided. Step 4 of the research methodology will show the overall totals of the

evaluation criteria, which will be used by the researcher to form the conclusions and recommendations in chapter 5.

The first LOE to be evaluated will be FONOPS Air as shown in table 2.

Table 2. FONOPS Air Evaluation Criteria			
Question	Least Effective (1 point)	Somewhat Effective (2 points)	Most Effective (3 points)
1) Is the LOE feasible?		X	
2) Is the LOE suitable?		X	
3) Is the LOE acceptable?	X		
4) Is the LOE sustainable?	X		
Total points	6		

Source: Developed by author.

Question 1: The feasibility of FONOPS Air, when measured on the scale of overall effectiveness, would be somewhat effective. FONOPS Air is capable of being carried out provided there are aircraft available for the mission in the AOR.

Question 2: The suitability of FONOPS Air is measured as somewhat effective. This is because military aircraft can be used to enforce international airspace above China's artificial islands in the SCS.

Question 3: The acceptability of FONOPS Air is measured as least effective. The reduction in effectiveness is due to the associated risk based on the advantage gained. Flying military aircraft over China's artificial islands in the SCS as a sole means of enforcing UNCLOS may be viewed as aggressive and carries an increased risk of miscalculation.

Question 4: FONOPS Air as a sustainable LOE is measured as least effective.

This is because the requirements necessary to keep aircraft in the region or to consistently fly aircraft from other locations in order to conduct this LOE are not sustainable over the suggested time period.

Totals: The total score for this LOE is a six out of a possible twelve. As a LOE, FONOPS Air has the ability to enforce the international airspace over China's artificial islands. However, the associated risk of escalation makes this LOE less effective by itself due to misperceived intent. China may perceive overflight of its artificial islands by a military aircraft as an aggressive action that warrants a military response since there is no way for China to fully know the intent of the aircraft in question or whether it is carrying weapons. Also, the required cost to maintain this LOE over the proposed two-year period give it a marginal chance of achieving the desired end state.

Table 3. FONOPS Sea Evaluation Criteria			
Question	Least Effective (1 point)	Somewhat Effective (2 points)	Most Effective (3 points)
1) Is the LOE feasible?			X
2) Is the LOE suitable?			X
3) Is the LOE acceptable?			X
4) Is the LOE sustainable?			X
Total points	12		

Source: Developed by author.

Question 1: The feasibility of FONOPS Sea is measured as most effective. The continual presence of USN vessels in the Asia-Pacific region can be used to carry out this LOE with relative simplicity.

Question 2: The suitability of FONOPS Sea is measured as most effective. Just like with FONOPS Air, since USN vessels will be used to conduct this LOE and enforce the international maritime global commons, the appropriate means are being used for the appropriate purpose.

Question 3: The acceptability of FONOPS Sea is measured as most effective. The associated risk of conducting FONOPS near China's artificial islands in the SCS is an appropriate balance compared to the advantage gained.

Question 4: The sustainability of FONOPS Sea is measured as most effective. This is because any USN vessel operating in the Asia-Pacific region can conduct this mission without imposing any additional costs.

Totals: The total score for this LOE is twelve out of twelve. As a stand-alone LOE, FONOPS Sea is extremely effective because it accomplishes the task of enforcing international waters as defined in UNCLOS while balancing the associated risk to the vessel itself and the potential for escalation. In contrast to FONOPS Air, the slower speeds at which a USN ship would conduct this mission greatly reduces the chance of a miscalculation while still helping achieve the desired end state.

Table 4. TSC Exercises Evaluation Criteria			
Question	Least Effective (1 point)	Somewhat Effective (2 points)	Most Effective (3 points)
1) Is the LOE feasible?			X
2) Is the LOE suitable?			X
3) Is the LOE acceptable?			X
4) Is the LOE sustainable?	X		
Total points	10		

Source: Developed by author.

Question 1: The feasibility of TSC Exercises is measured as most effective. Conducting these exercises with Asia-Pacific partner nations is an LOE that can be planned and acted upon.

Question 2: The suitability of TSC Exercises is measured as most effective. By using this LOE as a method to show solidarity among China's neighboring nations in the Asia-Pacific region, the overall combined strength of these partners is increased.

Question 3: The acceptability of TSC Exercises is measured as most effective. This is because the balance of associated risk in conducting them is appropriate when considering the associated cost of doing so.

Question 4: The sustainability of TSC Exercises is measured as least effective. The associated cost in resources such as equipment, personnel, fuel, etc. are significant when preparing and executing this LOE.

Totals: The total score for this LOE is ten out of twelve. Establishing and maintaining strong working relationships with Asia-Pacific partners is necessary for the U.S. military in order to help maintain stability in the region. These partnerships also provide a way for the U.S. military to develop familiarity with HN militaries and lessens the burden of operational reach provided there is HN consent for the U.S. military to conduct military operations from HN facilities. This reduces response times in the event of a crisis due to the HN proximity to the SCS compared to current U.S. staging areas.

Table 5. IO Campaign Evaluation Criteria			
Question	Least Effective (1 point)	Somewhat Effective (2 points)	Most Effective (3 points)
1) Is the LOE feasible?			X
2) Is the LOE suitable?			X
3) Is the LOE acceptable?			X
4) Is the LOE sustainable?		X	
Total points	11		

Source: Developed by author.

Question 1: The feasibility of an IO Campaign is measured as most effective. An IO Campaign used to highlight China's actions in the SCS is a simple and effective LOE.

Question 2: The suitability of an IO campaign is measured as most effective. Since an IO Campaign can be adapted to the purpose of highlighting China's actions in the SCS and paint them in a negative light, this is a suitable as an LOE and helps to achieve the desired end state.

Question 3: The acceptability of an IO Campaign is measured as most effective. The associated risk of conducting this LOE compared to the anticipated reward makes it an attractive option that can be used to achieve the desired end state.

Question 4: The sustainability of an IO Campaign is measured as somewhat effective. The requirements and resources necessary to conduct this LOE may increase gradually over time, which would increase the associated cost in execution.

Totals: The total score for this LOE is eleven out of twelve. An IO campaign can be extremely effective at influencing negative public opinion about China's actions in the SCS. As a stand alone LOE, the major driver in the scope of an IO campaign will be the amount of resources dedicated toward it. When used to deliver the strategic messaging,

an IO campaign can greatly assist in achieving the desired end state. However, using this LOE may need to be analyzed against additional IO campaigns that may already be in use throughout the Asia-Pacific region. If larger or more pressing stability concerns are threatening the region, such as a volatile Korean peninsula, then broader strategic goals that could require USG and PRC cooperation may take precedence.

Step 4: Answer Primary Research Question

With all the LOEs analyzed using the evaluation criteria, it is now possible to move to Step 4 of the research methodology and aggregate the findings in order to answer the primary research question. Table 6 shows the aggregated results of the evaluation criteria.

Table 6. Evaluation Criteria Aggregated Results	
LOE	Overall Effectiveness (points)
FONOPS Air	6
FONOPS Sea	12
TSC Exercises	10
IO Campaign	11
Most effective LOE	FONOPS Sea

Source: Developed by author.

Based upon the data presented in table 6, the most effective LOE is FONOPS Sea. The four LOEs as part of the operational approach were selected in order to move from current conditions to the desired end state. Each LOE has the ability to be used individually and in conjunction with the other LOEs to accomplish this task. By assessing each LOE individually, the evaluation criteria used was able to validate each LOE's

ability to assist in achieving the desired end state. Also, since the LOEs were chosen as a result of the secondary research questions, the results can also be used to answer the primary research question. Based upon the aggregated results in table 6, the most effective LOE of the four evaluated is FONOPS Sea. Therefore, the answer to the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the artificial islands in the SCS?” is yes with caveats.

Step 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The final step of the research methodology is to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research. This information can be found in chapter 5.

Chapter Conclusion

Based upon the research methodology, the answer to the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” is yes with caveats. The research has shown that the USG should use military sea power to challenge the artificial islands in the SCS. Based upon the results of the evaluation criteria, certain LOEs have a higher measure of effectiveness than others. But this comparison only applies to the LOEs when considered individually. Further conclusions and recommendations can be found in chapter 5 about the combined effects of multiple LOEs and why certain LOEs scored lower than others. This information will be used to offer recommendations for future research on this complex and evolving problem.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Introduction

As presented in chapter 4, the answer to the primary research question, “Should the USG use military air and sea power to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS?” is yes with caveats. Even though FONOPS Sea was determined to be the most effective LOE, this does not necessarily mean that the USG should not use military air power to accomplish the same end state. Throughout the evaluation process, some interesting trends arose based upon the four criteria of feasibility, suitability, acceptability, and sustainability. With the exception of FONOPS Air, the main areas of reduced scores occurred in acceptability and sustainability. This point is important because as multiple LOEs are considered in order to move from the current conditions to the desired end state, specific emphasis can be placed on the level of risk, which goes toward acceptability, and the amount of resources to dedicate, which goes toward sustainability. FONOPS Air as a LOE was deemed to have the greatest risk of unintended escalation when considering the types of military aircraft available to perform this mission and the threat systems in place due to China’s militarization efforts. Any change to the current conditions could serve to increase both the acceptability and the sustainability of using FONOPS Air as an LOE to achieve the desired end state. FONOPS Sea as a comparison received the highest scores due to its simplicity and the ability to be executed with either regionally deployed or transiting USN vessels.

This thesis also highlighted several important points as the secondary research questions were answered. First was that the USG should be concerned about what

happens in the SCS even though they have no territorial claims in the region because of the effects to the Asia-Pacific region and the global economy. Second was that FONOPS is the means available to enforce the international legal requirements of UNCLOS. As the idea of FONOPS was developed, it was further broken down into FONOPS Air and FONOPS Sea in order to highlight the potential advantages and disadvantages of each. Navy terminology takes another approach in its description of these terms and calls them “goods” and “others.” This is because an option may not fit the criteria of being a definite disadvantage, but could still be considered an “other.” Third was that U.S. forces can effectively operate in the SCS under the umbrella of China’s advanced A2/AD network because of its similarities to other AORs where routine operations occur. Lastly, with the U.S. military operating in the Asia-Pacific region, they could engage in TSC exercises in order to reassure partners in the region. Each of these answers produced an LOE, which was evaluated using the evaluation criteria. Even though one LOE was determined more effective than the others, the combination and application of LOEs within the operational approach can serve to ultimately accomplish the desired end state.

Conclusions

This study determined that not only should the USG challenge the militarization of the artificial islands in the SCS, but also that military sea power was the most effective means of doing so with the ways being primarily FONOPS Sea combined with TSC Exercises and an appropriate IO campaign. Simply because military sea power received the highest score based upon the assigned evaluation criteria does not mean that it alone will achieve the desired end state. An operational approach that is developed in order to tackle a difficult problem such as this one must use a variety of LOEs. For the purposes

of this study, the LOEs chosen were in accordance with the logic used to answer the secondary questions and ultimately the primary research question. By comparing LOEs with the evaluation criteria, it was possible to determine whether any of the proposed LOEs would be ineffective. Even though FONOPS Air received the lowest score based upon the results, it was determined that all LOEs would be effective, but would vary in terms of acceptability and sustainability. The most important aspect of this data is that these measures of acceptability and sustainability apply to the current conditions, as they exist today. Any change to the current conditions would be met with a corresponding change in the acceptable level of risk and means to sustain the directed operation.

Since the focus of this study referenced the militarization of artificial islands, the selected instrument of national power was the military. As with any military operation, the chances for miscalculation and escalation of either party are a valid concern. However, the research produced an operational approach with associated LOEs that were surprisingly simple. Most studies of the militarization of the SCS tend to focus on the technological advances made by China's PLA, People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and People's Liberation Army Naval Air Forces (PLAN(AF)). These studies then focus on the technological gap between the PLA and the U.S. military, often citing spending increases and the need for more advanced equipment. While it is necessary to continually improve U.S. military equipment and capabilities, this study focused on using the military instrument of national power in order to achieve a strategic end state in the SCS and not on defeating PLA capabilities with those of the U.S. military. PLA capabilities aside, the research in this study showed that in order to accomplish the desired end state, a very direct and cost

effective option arose as an alternative. FONOPS Sea is a simple and effective way to challenge China's militarization of artificial islands in the SCS. Instead of increased spending on military technology, which is important and cannot be understated, the simple execution of FONOPS by USN vessels can accomplish in one year what multiple years of spending on ways to combat China's A2/AD network can accomplish. When used in conjunction with TSC exercises and a well-planned IO campaign, the stability of the Asia-Pacific region can be assured while our partnerships with neighboring nations is strengthened. Finally, these actions will ensure that vital SLOCs remain secure and that the global commons remains open for use by all nations in order to fuel the global economy.

Recommendations

Recommendations for decision makers: The strategic situation in the Asia-Pacific region involves some very complex problems for decision makers. Moving forward, FONOPS should be immediately considered as viable options in order to challenge the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS. These operations require planning and specific training in order to ensure that the correct strategic message is received. FONOPS also carry a certain amount of risk in execution since the incorrect strategic message could lead to miscalculation and unwanted conflict. Because of this, it is recommended to incorporate FONOPS on either side of regularly scheduled TSC exercises with partner nations in the Asia-Pacific region. Doing this allows the USG to gain solidarity with its partners in the region and can lessen the risk of escalation due to the mobilization of Asia-Pacific militaries in preparation for scheduled TSC events. Military exercises with partner nations in the region can bolster ties among governments

and give the U.S. military an opportunity to help improve partner nation military proficiency. The frequency of TSC exercises should increase until they occur on a bi-annual basis. This level of frequency will allow the U.S. military to plan for and establish a sustainable rotation of forces throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Combining these efforts with a well-structured IO Campaign can achieve the desired end state in the SCS.

The proposed LOEs within the operational approach provide a realistic and readily executable set of options for the decision-maker to consider. Based upon the results of the evaluation criteria, FONOPS Sea was chosen to be the most effective LOE within the operational approach. But, as stated before, the desired end state has the most success of being achieved when all the proposed LOEs are considered and executed. Bolstering ties with partner nations in the Asia-Pacific region can serve to strategically message China that international opinion does not agree or approve with its actions in the SCS and that the international legal standards in UNCLOS will be enforced. A proposed goal for the proposed bi-annual TSC Exercises would be for them to take place within the SCS and for them to have the scale of a U.S. led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise. This can help establish a narrative counter to China's efforts and solidify the SCS as part of the global commons with secure and shared SLOCs. Ultimately, the desired end state would see Asia-Pacific nations conducting FONOPS for themselves, which would not only alleviate U.S. joint forces from having to conduct them, but also justify these nations' actions in the court of world opinion which would strengthen the status quo.

Recommendations to future researchers: If researchers choose to perform additional research on this topic, there are a number of areas briefly mentioned but not expanded upon that could provide initial steering. What are the potential impacts and

strategic gains that can be made by IGOs by working with Asia-Pacific nations? Can IGOs be used to aid diplomatic efforts as an additional instrument of national power? Can an IGO assist in preparing the groundwork for future military operations? How can an IO campaign be used in order to positively influence Asia-Pacific nations toward the strategic end state of the USG considering the availability of media in these countries? How can planners execute a balanced IO campaign in light of the multiple strategic objectives at any given time in the Asia-Pacific region? Is there a limit to sustainment of TSC Exercises or is this a cost worthy investment? Further research on how all instruments of national power can influence the desired end state would help solidify the proposed operational approach in this thesis. These are just a few questions that have come up during the course of this research. Each can serve as its own research question and produce several secondary questions.

In order to fully understand the significance of this region, future researchers must understand how it affects the global economy. Because an estimated \$5.3 trillion in commerce travels through the SCS on an annual basis, this must be taken into account as options are considered. The willingness of any nation to get involved in a potential conflict in the SCS would come with a direct affect to the global economy. For an economy as large as China's, this must be a consideration when measuring appropriate responses. Research in China's risk assessments when considering its own economy and the global economy would provide further insight and make for exceedingly interesting follow-on study.

Final Thoughts

In closing, it is important to note that this proposed strategic approach is one that must fit into an already very complex environment. Considering the current state of world affairs, many may ask why the USG maintains so many forces and devotes so much attention to the Asia-Pacific region. It is the opinion of the researcher that if the USG were to reduce its presence in the region, the role would be filled by another nation-state. This brings with it the increased chance for escalation and conflict because of competing desires and ambitions, which would destabilize the region and affect the global economy. A counter argument might also be to allow China to take up the mantle of the maintainer of the status quo in the SCS. Unfortunately, based upon China's actions over the last several years and its disregard for the territorial sovereignty of other nation-states, it would be difficult to make a convincing case in China's favor. China's official policy is that it opposes "hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion" (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). Yet, the facts are all directly counter to this claim. Claiming the majority of the SCS with its 9-dash line claim, building and militarizing artificial islands inside the EEZ of other nation-states, and using its military capabilities to deny entry to the entire region are not actions reflective of a nation who claims to "maintain peace, pursue development, and share prosperity (Xinhua Agency 2015, 3). This lack of transparency gives pause to China's actions and its trustworthiness in other endeavors. The USG on the other hand has no territorial claims in the Asia-Pacific region and is able to act as a responsible third party to ensure the status quo is maintained. Most Asia-Pacific nations seem content to allow the USG to maintain the status quo even though it is not a signatory of UNCLOS. This also serves the USG well

in its interests, allows it to ensure the free-flow of trade, and to act as a check against any nation-state that would seek to upset the balance maintained by the status quo.

When considering the use of this strategic approach, it is also important to view its impact compared to the overall strategic goals for the Asia-Pacific region. The USG could certainly choose to move in heavy-handed and use the entire weight of the U.S. military to ensure its interests are maintained. On the other hand, the USG could choose to sit by while tensions continue to rise and a new status quo emerges. However, both of these choices are extremely short sighted. Both are damaging to the USG either through the enormous commitment of forces and risk of all-out war, or the global economic impacts that arise from choosing to do nothing. It could further be argued that either option would ultimately have a huge impact on the global economy, which would negate them from even being considered. Therefore, the strategic approach of remaining neutral regarding territorial sovereignty disputes and instead enforcing international legal standards as outlined in UNCLOS is the most effective way to maintain the status quo in the Asia-Pacific region. This approach does not stop China from militarizing the artificial islands it has already built, but it can serve to diminish the illegal claims of territorial sovereignty based upon these islands. Further, it can reinforce the fact that the SCS is part of the global commons and no single nation-state can claim the body of water as its own.

This strategic approach also carries large implications for the future. Moving forward, there will likely be many situations where it will be mutually beneficial to have China as a working partner to solve regional and world issues. The current situation in North Korea is a prime example of a larger strategic objective for the Asia-Pacific region where spending our strategic capital on an issue such as the SCS may not be the wisest

decision. The strategic approach offered in this thesis must be considered as an option to be metered within the larger strategic goals of the USG. The linkages between global economies create a shared interest that can be leveraged to achieve strategic goals that can be mutually beneficial. While it cannot be the policy of the USG to condone China's actions in the SCS, by maintaining the status quo in the region, the USG can ensure that the global commons of the SCS remain open and that vital SLOCs remain secure so that all nations have the same opportunity to prosper.

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