

**The Right tool for the Job:**

Employing the U.S. Coast Guard to Transition Strategic Guidance into Operational Success

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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> China's rise and vision of a new geopolitical structure threatens the current "liberal international order" led by the United States since the end of the Cold War. The "great power competition" between the United States and China that has emerged in the area of the conflict continuum below the level of armed conflict called the "gray zone." Recent commanders have struggled to translate the United States' strategic objective of countering Chinese expansion into an operational success in INDOPACOM. The unutilized tool needed to exploit illegitimate Chinese actions in the South China Sea is the United States Coast Guard. Currently the Coast Guard presence in INDOPACOM is limited and must be permanently expanded. This expansion will have the operational effect of first enabling unique Coast Guard authorities to be employed on a far larger scale. Secondly, increased Coast Guard presence will effectively strengthen				
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The current geopolitical situation in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) region is eerily similar to what it was on the eve of WWII in the Pacific. Roughly 80 years ago in the INDOPACOM region, the United States was locked in a power competition with a rising nation. President Roosevelt sought to persuade Japan to accept the United States' regional hegemony by employing steel and oil embargos as an economic tool of government. This decision severed all Japanese oil imports and was a direct blow to the center of gravity for Japan's war machine. Roosevelt's hard lined approach was viewed by Japanese leaders as an act of war<sup>1</sup> and had the unintended strategic effect of escalating the competition into WWII in the Pacific. Roosevelt's employment of the wrong tool of government cost enormous amounts of blood and treasure culminating in the United States' employment of two nuclear bombs against the Japanese home islands.

The United States cannot afford to make the same miscalculations during the present-day competition in the INDOPACOM region against China, its near peer competitor. The United States must identify and utilize a tool of government capable of transitioning the strategic objective of countering Chinese expansion into operational successes below the level of armed conflict. The organization with the flexibility to fully operate below the level of armed conflict is the United States Coast Guard. Currently the Coast Guard presence in INDOPACOM is limited and must be permanently expanded. This expansion will have the operational effect of first enabling unique Coast Guard authorities to be employed on a far larger scale. Secondly, increased Coast Guard presence will effectively strengthen alliances and enhance their organic capabilities. Finally, Coast Guard integration into the existing INDOPACOM command structure

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Higgs. "How U.S. Economic Warfare Provoked Japan's Attack on Pearl Harbor," *Independent Institute*, May 1, 2006. <https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=1930>

will strengthen operational planning and provide a unity of effort. Only in this way will the U.S. effectively counter China's escalating behavior without descending into war.

### **Background**

China's rise and vision of a new geopolitical structure threatens the current "liberal international order" ruled by the United States since the end of the Cold War. According to Graham Allison's Thucydides Trap theory, war between rising and ruling powers is inevitable. Although his theory is disputed by many academics and political scientists, his claim examines the evidence of 16 historical clashes of rising and ruling powers over the last 500 years of which 12 ended in war<sup>2</sup>. Regardless of the accuracy of Graham Allison's claim, a war between the U.S. and China, both nuclear super powers, would have a far more devastating effect on the global populace than either of the World Wars. This power struggle between the United States and China has been strategically labeled a "Great Power Competition". This label seeks to undermine Allison's theory by promoting the narrative that each country can jockey for global hegemony without escalating into an armed conflict. Additionally, the threat of a third great war between nuclear superpowers escalating into what the renown theorist, Carl Von-Clausewitz, coined a "Total War," has limited this great power competition. All these factors have compressed this competition below the level of armed conflict and into the gray zone.

The gray zone is an area within the conflict continuum below the level of armed conflict but above peace time is an ever-expanding spectrum. "The gray zone is characterized by intense political, economic, informational, and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war<sup>3</sup>." The gray zone distinctly advantages the

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Allison. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017 <https://thecic.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/180820-Destined-for-War-Graham-Allison.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Votel et al. "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone." National Defense University Press. National Defense University Press, January 1, 2016. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-80/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/>.

authoritarian system of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and disadvantages the United States' democratic system, specifically limiting the Department of Defense's options. In PRC's communist government, all forms of national power are exercised by the government and in line with the government's objective of reshaping the international system in its favor. In contrast, the United States' democratic system does not promote unity of effort across the whole of government. Competing objectives and different desired end states of each governmental bureaucracy limit the unity of effort achieved easily by China's authoritarian government. Essentially, the Chinese Communist system enables it to operate unimpeded in the gray zone while the United States' democratic system limits its ability to leverage a whole of government approach to reach its objective of contesting Chinese bid for global hegemony.

China's gray zone actions of island building and incursions into a state's sovereign waters present both a problem and an opportunity for the United States to exploit. "China's maritime expansion activities enable it to potentially interfere with oil and gas exploration, and its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities pose a challenge to the US Navy and Air Force operations and to maritime and air traffic. In sum, China poses a potential threat to trade flows, resource extraction, and military operations in a highly strategic body of water<sup>4</sup>." In short, the logical objective of recent Chinese actions is to deny the United States access to the South China Sea by either militarizing the area or gaining sovereignty over it through establishment of customary international law.

### **Leverage Unique Authorities**

Chinese gray zone actions have challenged the U.S. but also present an Achilles heel which the Coast Guard is uniquely equipped to exploit. Historically, the Chinese Communist's

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Stephen Burgess. "Confronting China's Maritime Expansion in the South China Sea: A Collective Action Problem." *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Air University Press, (August 31, 2020): <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2331176/confronting-chinas-maritime-expansion-in-the-south-china-sea-a-collective-actio/>

Party's domestic legitimacy was "ratified not by ballot but by people's voluntary cooperation and participation in massive political and social movements<sup>5</sup>." Adherence to party agendas was seen as legitimizing the party. Mao Zedong, the father of modern-day communist China, said "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun<sup>6</sup>." In many ways, these views underpin Chinese domestic and international actions and reflect current policy. A State's sovereignty is defined as "the authority of a State to govern without interference from another State." Meaning, "all States are equals; therefore, no State has authority over another State<sup>7</sup>." China's predatory actions within the INDOPACOM region are at odds with this most fundamental principle of international law. Presently, Chinese actions regarding sovereignty over the South China Sea, have been seen as aggressive and illegitimate but have largely been uncontested by the United States<sup>8</sup>.

The U.S. Navy has conducted freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in disputed areas to contest illegitimate Chinese territorial claims but has done little to stop the Chinese sovereignty infringements in the region. "FONOPs have proved insufficient in preventing Beijing from exercising coercion and expanding its influence, including blocking its neighbors from accessing oil, gas and fish in their own waters," explained Bonnie Glaser, the director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She continued by stating, "FONOPs are therefore necessary, but not enough to defend America's broader interests in enforcing international rules and strengthening our relationships in the region<sup>9</sup>." Time as a factor of Operational Art Theory, is tilted in the Chinese favor. The U.S. must change its posture

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<sup>5</sup> Ruan Lotus Yang "The Chinese Communist Party and Legitimacy." *Diplomat*. September 30, 2015. Accessed May 08, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/the-chinese-communist-party-and-legitimacy/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ruan Lotus Yang

<sup>7</sup> Melissa Harvison. "Operational Law Primer." Newport RI: U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department. January 2020. 4

<sup>8</sup> David B. Larter "In challenging China's claims in the South China Sea, the US Navy is getting more assertive." February 5, 2020. <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/02/05/in-challenging-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-the-us-navy-is-getting-more-assertive/>

<sup>9</sup> David B. Larter

and tactics in INDOPACOM before it loses the opportunity to exploit Chinese illegitimate territorial gains and sovereignty infringements. The failure of the United States to openly contest Chinese violations of the sovereignty of other states legitimizes China's action instead of exploiting it as illegitimate and predatory.

The United States Coast Guard's Title 14 authorities empower it to openly contest Chinese encroachment and exploitation of resources in partner nation's sovereign waters. 14 U.S. Code 522, gives officers of any grade the authority to "make inquiries, examinations, inspections, searches, seizures, and arrests upon the high seas and waters over which the United States has jurisdiction<sup>10</sup>." Additionally, Coast Guard Officers possess the authority to seize any vessel and arrest those onboard if a violation of US law has been committed in international waters. "This unique and internationally recognized U.S. code legitimizes Coast Guard searches and seizures of Chinese commercial vessels committing crimes outside internationally recognized Chinese waters.<sup>11</sup>" This authority enables the United States to maintain a perception of legitimacy within the international community when the Coast Guard evokes its article 14 authorities to counter Chinese incursions and operations in the regions. Undermining China's legitimacy strengthens the U.S. position regionally and globally.

The unique authorities bestowed upon the United States Coast Guard as both a Law Enforcement and Military service, give it the legitimacy to confront Chinese predatory actions and blatant disregard for the sovereignty of other countries. Countering Chinese pursuits in this manner diminishes the chance of escalation and erodes the PRC's global prestige, a strategic center of gravity for the communist regime in China. Although the Coast Guard's authorities present a unique strength needed to exploit China's legitimacy weakness, the Coast Guard

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<sup>10</sup> *Title 14 Coast Guard*, U.S. Code 522 (1946) <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title14-section522&num=0&edition=prelim>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Navy. *Naval Warfare*, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP-1). Washington, DC. Commandant USCG, Commandant USMC, CNO, April 2020.

existing footprint is not capable of achieving the objective. A larger persistent Coast Guard presence in INDOPACOM would enable the large-scale exploitation of China's legitimacy weakness by expanding its unique authorities on a larger scale. This poses a clear and present threat to Chinese ambitions in the INDOPACOM region below the level of armed conflict.

### **Increase Partnerships and Partner Capacity**

China's illegitimate actions can be countered or further exploited by a highly skilled alliance network capable of enforcing host nation sovereignty. The RAND Corporation studied the gray zone competition between the United States and China and found "that the United States can treat the ongoing gray zone competition more as an opportunity than a risk: By seeking to coerce, acquire influence within, or destabilize key countries and regions, Russia and China are opening the space for a vigorous U.S. campaign to rally allies and partners in both regions in the direction of an effective response."<sup>12</sup> China's predatory economic dealings and aggressive maritime actions have alienated it from other countries in the region providing the United States an opportunity undermine China's legitimacy by supporting allies and building partners.

The organization perfectly aligned to effectively counter China through partnership building is the United States Coast Guard. Admiral Schultz, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, recognized this relationship when he stated, "Our specialized capabilities and expansive international relationships enable us to build partner-nation capacity and model rules-based values"<sup>13</sup>. Although alignment exists between the ways and means of building sustained regional

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<sup>12</sup> Lyle Morris et al. *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2942.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html).

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Bridget. "Partner of Choice': Schultz Promotes Expanded U.S. Coast Guard Role in Asia Talks." *Homeland Security Today*, October 25, 2019. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/maritime-security/partner-of-choice-schultz-promotes-expanded-u-s-coast-guard-role-in-asia-talks/>

partnerships, the United States' strategic focus on the Middle East at the expense of INDOPACOM has undermined U.S. credibility.

The U.S. must bridge the expansive Pacific Ocean to strengthen its credibility and reassure potential allies of its enduring commitment. An increased permanent Coast Guard presence in the INDOPACOM theater provides U.S. allies and partner nations a tangible action to re-enforce the strategic decision to pivot to the Pacific. The United States Coast Guard must identify basing opportunities in close proximity to the contested areas of the South China Sea. This would strengthen strategic alliances and operationally embolden partner nations to enforce their nation's sovereignty. Additionally, maintaining a persistent Coast Guard presence would undermine the tyranny of Space and Time as operational factors.

The Army's Special Operations Teams are the premiere partner capacity builders for the Department of Defense. Their success is predicated on building, training and leading host nation forces. The accomplishment of that mission requires a long-term commitment, regional expertise, and trust with the local community. In the maritime domain, commitment is expressed by constant presence or by home porting an asset in a specific location. Independent deployments of Coast Guard Cutters or periodically planned exercises will not build the relationship or show an enduring U.S. commitment to the region. The United States Coast Guard will be able to more effectively undermine China's legitimacy by reaching Admiral Schultz's desire of being the regional partner of choice<sup>14</sup>.

The United States Coast Guard is the partner of choice for regional maritime partners. Since "Coast Guards, not navies, are the new asset of choice for many states in East and Southeast Asia to assert sovereignty over disputed waters<sup>15</sup>," United States Coast Guard is the

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<sup>14</sup> Bridget Johnson

<sup>15</sup> Lyle Morris. "The Era of Coast Guards in the Asia-Pacific Is Upon Us," *The RAND Blog*, March 8, 2017. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/03/the-era-of-coast-guards-in-the-asia-pacific-is-upon.html>

ideal organization to engage laterally with regional partner Coast Guards to strengthen their organic capabilities and capacity. This approach would enable the United States to engage on a more peer to peer basis with partner nations expanding the number of countries capable of enforcing their host nation sovereignty. This will increase the visibility of China's illegitimate and coercive behavior forcing them to constantly defend their crafted image of "a kind, gentle, slow-moving, extremely large and powerful nation which only acts peacefully to defend its sovereign interests<sup>16</sup>" against a unified regional resistance. China aims to divide and intimidate, while actions of the United States Coast Guard would rally a unified opposition force attacking the Chinese strategy.

### **Integrate into Existing Command Structure**

The permanent integration of a Coast Guard Officer into the INDOPACOM J3 and J5 staffs must be completed to ensure the effective employment of Coast Guard assets in support of national strategic objectives. According the Tri-Service Strategy, "Our integrated Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard must maintain clear-eyed resolve to compete with, deter, and, if necessary, defeat our adversaries while we accelerate development of a modernized, integrated all-domain naval force for the future<sup>17</sup>." The afore proposed expansion of a consistent Coast Guard footprint would necessitate organizational representation within INDOPACOM's staff to uphold Coast Guard equities and facilitate a clear-eyed unity of effort at the operational level. The Joint Publication 3-0 detailing Joint Operations states, "The capacity of our Armed Forces to operate as a cohesive joint team is a key advantage in any operational environment. Success depends on well-integrated command headquarters (HQ), supporting organizations, and forces

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<sup>16</sup> Lansing, Shawn. "A White Hull Approach to Taming the Dragon: Using the Coast Guard to Counter China." February 22, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/white-hull-approach-taming-dragon-using-coast-guard-counter-china/>

<sup>17</sup> Berger, David H., Gilday, Michael M., Schultz, Karl L. *Advantage at Sea; Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*. Washington, DC., December 2020. Forward

that operate as a team<sup>18</sup>.” Service representation must be present at the operational level to effectively conduct mission planning integrating either Coast Guard authorities or assets.

Navy Central Command’s (NAVCENT) structure is a successful model of Coast Guard integration into operational level staffs that should be emulated. Patrol Forces South West Asia (PATFORSWA), located in Manama Bahrain, is the largest overseas Coast Guard unit fielding over 150 personnel and seven Coast Guard Cutters. Its mission statement is to support “Operation Enduring Freedom with continued maritime humanitarian presence on the seas, providing U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet with combat-ready assets, utilizing our [Coast Guard] unique access to foreign territorial seas and ports, formulating strong and independent relationships throughout the Arabian Gulf, and leveraging the full-spectrum, flexible vessel boarding capabilities and maritime country engagements on the shore<sup>19</sup>.” PATFORSWA relies of the efforts of its Operations Officer (N3 equivalent) and its Future Operations Officer (N5 equivalent) to inject Coast Guard authorities and assets into the operational planning conducted at NAVCENT. Those Coast Guard Officers educate Senior Navy leaders on niche authorities and capabilities available to them but most importantly they clarify the Coast Guard’s role in missions, enhancing cohesion within the team. Unit cohesion is only formed by countless hours of training at the tactical level or by proper joint planning at the operational level.

The failure to successfully integrate service representation into the joint structure within operational commands is written in blood as was the case in Operation Anaconda and the Grenada invasion. “At the time Operation Anaconda began, unity of command had not been

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Operations*. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0. Washington, D.C.: CJCS, 17 January 2017 Incorporating Change 1, 22 October 2018. Read: V-1 to V-5. I-2

<sup>19</sup> United States Coast Guard Atlantic Area official Web site. “Patrol Forces South West Asia (PATFORSWA)” Accessed May 01, 2021. <https://www.atlanticarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Area-Units/PATFORSWA/>

established because the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan was not yet fully mature<sup>20</sup>.” The command structure bifurcated from the unifying Central Command to an Air Component Command and a Land Component Command, each in separate locations with their own commanders and staffs. In fact, the mission was planned without the input from the air component command or its operation center. This failure within the command and control structure almost lead to the failure of the mission and the death of many service members. In the aftermath, DoD recognized the value of fully integrating cross domain planners in the development of operations<sup>21</sup>. As Operation Anaconda illustrates, integration of service components during the planning and execution of operations is crucial in building a cohesive team capable of leveraging operational art to translating clear strategic guidance to tactical commanders.

### **Counter**

Some may argue that employing the U.S. Coast Guard on a large scale to counter China’s aggressive and illegitimate action in INDOPACOM would elevate the potential of an escalation of the competition into a conflict, would place Coast Guard assets in a no-win situation, and would actually undermine U.S. legitimacy in the region. The underpinning of this argument rests on the grave significance China places in gaining sovereignty over the South China Sea. Xi Jinping said “We absolutely will not permit any person, any organization, any political party—at any time, in any form—to separate any piece of Chinese territory from China.<sup>22</sup>” From the PRC’s perspective, they have a legitimate and historical claim to the South China Sea based off

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Kugler. “Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Adaptation in Battle.” *Case Studies in Defense Transformation Number 5*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2007, 7

<sup>21</sup> Richard Kugler, 21

<sup>22</sup> “Highlights of Xi’s speech at rally marking PLA’s 90th anniversary,” *China Daily*, 2 August 2017, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-08/02/content\\_30327309\\_9.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-08/02/content_30327309_9.htm)

the nine-dashed line<sup>23</sup>. According to President Xi's statement, any action by the U.S. Coast Guard to undermine China's claim to sovereignty over the South China Sea would weaken both the domestic and international legitimacy of the communist party placing its authoritarian regime at risk for removal. This action would not be permitted and could serve to escalate the competition into a conflict. The United States would need to employ assets that could project overwhelming kinetic power to deter Chinese escalation while conducting operations that could be seen as placing the communist regime on death ground.

The U.S. Coast Guard is not manned, trained or equipped to project kinetic power or deter escalation while contesting illegitimate Chinese sovereignty claims. Flooding minimally armed assets into a contested area does not serve to deter China. Instead, it only provokes China by exploiting a critical vulnerability with relatively defenseless assets. Increased U.S. Coast Guard presence would increase interactions between the two powers as the Chinese Coast Guard and People's Liberation Navy flood the contested environment of the South China Sea and bordering islands. Decreased diplomatic communication and increased interactions between the armed services of the two countries would exponentially increase the chance of a miscalculation propelling the Great Power Competition into an armed conflict.

Some may even use the scenario presently transpiring in the Arabian Gulf between U.S. ships and armed Iranian vessels to support this point. As recently as April 2021, armed Iranian vessels attempted to coerce United States Coast Guard Cutters out of waters inaccurately claimed by Iran<sup>24</sup> inciting an armed standoff between the two sides. This "dance of death" has been

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<sup>23</sup> Bader, Jeffrey A. "The U.S. and China's Nine-Dash Line: Ending the Ambiguity." *Brookings*. February 6, 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-u-s-and-chinas-nine-dash-line-ending-the-ambiguity/>

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Fifth Fleet, "Unsafe and Unprofessional Interaction with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN)" U.S. Navy Office of Information. April 27, 2021. Accessed May 01, 2021. <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2586021/unsafe-and-unprofessional-interaction-with-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-co/>

occurring for years<sup>25</sup>, feeding either side's narratives that the other is the aggressor without resolving the underlying dispute. The overwhelming disparity in force and combat power between the United States and Iran has capped this competition below the level of armed conflict.

In the case of China and the United States, that same overwhelming disparity in force is not present and in fact, at the tactical level, the disparity in capabilities between a Coast Guard Cutter and a Chinese People's Liberation Navy is expansive. In disputed areas where sovereignty and authorities are in question, as is the case in much of the South China Sea, the Coast Guard may "not [be] empowered to act, they [Coast Guard] damage the prestige of the United States with the stigma of having observed and done nothing. If empowered to act, they represent the proverbial knife in a gunfight, poorly equipped to deal with potential escalation<sup>26</sup>." This line of thinking concludes that as a large-scale operation to counter China and exploit illegitimate actions, the Coast Guard assets and authorities "would at this point be too little too late<sup>27</sup>" and may undermine U.S. legitimacy.

### **Rebuttal**

The arguments that a large-scale employment of the USCG elevates the potential of escalation, places the Coast Guard in no win situations and could undermine U.S. legitimacy is fundamentally flawed. The Chinese have no interest in escalating the competition into a conflict over a contested territory dispute especially when the United States' actions are backed by international law. Thomas Shugart, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security stated, "China has a very real and justified fear in the case of a major conflict, like over Taiwan,

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<sup>25</sup> Eric Schmitt. "Second Close Call Between Iranian and American Vessels Raise Tensions." *New York Times*. April 28, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/27/us/politics/iran-united-states-navy-persian-gulf-encounters.html>

<sup>26</sup> Dale Rielage. *Coast Guard: Wrong tool for the South China Sea*. Proceedings Vol. 143/9/1,375. United States Naval Institute. [https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/september/coast-guardwrong-tool-south-china-sea#\\_edn1](https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/september/coast-guardwrong-tool-south-china-sea#_edn1)

<sup>27</sup> Dale Rielage

of their economy being cut off from the world—it's almost all supplied by sea.<sup>28</sup>” The Chinese hesitancy to escalate the great power competition into a conflict to regain sovereignty of Taiwan which overtly undermines the PRC's authority suggests a minimal chance of escalation against a lesser perceived aggression. Additionally, according to Lyle Morris, an analyst with Rand Corp China, China sees “the role of law enforcement vessels and Coast Guards as relatively non-escalatory, or less escalatory, than a navy<sup>29</sup>.” Compared to the U.S. Navy's freedom of navigation operations which have been conducted periodically over the last 5 years and have not escalated the competition; Coast Guard actions will be less provocative and have a much more damaging impact on Chinese legitimacy especially if they are attacked by China.

There is no other U.S. governmental organization with enforcement capabilities and complete authorities to contest Chinese infringement of partner nations sovereignty in INDOPACOM as the Coast Guard. There is no international entity charged with enforcing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As such, China has infringed on the sovereignty of other nations, stealing natural resources at will without major consequence. Attempts have been made to undermine Chinese territorial claims and strike a blow at its legitimacy, but without an entity to enforce tribunal rulings, minimal lasting damage is done to China.

In 2016, China's territorial claims based on the historical nine dash line were found to be “without legal foundation<sup>30</sup>” by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Additionally, the Tribunal “concluded that Beijing's activities within the Philippines' two-hundred-nautical-

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<sup>28</sup> Jake Detsch. “U.S. Seeks to Counter China's Full-Court Press in Asia.” *Foreign Policy.com* March 17, 2021. Accessed April 20, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/17/senkakus-philippines-japan-korea-austin/>

<sup>29</sup> Lamothe, Dan. “To help counter China, U.S. turns to the Coast Guard.” *Washington Post.com* April 20, 2019. Accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2019/04/20/help-counter-china-us-turns-coast-guard/>

<sup>30</sup> Euan Graham. *The Hague Tribunal's South China Sea Ruling: Empty Provocation or Slow-Burning Influence?* Council of Councils Global Memo. <https://backend-live-coc.cfr.org/global-memos/hague-tribunals-south-china-sea-ruling-empty-provocation-or-slow-burning-influence>

mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ), such as illegal fishing and environmentally ruinous artificial island construction, infringed on Manila's sovereign rights<sup>31</sup>." Only the United States, with the backing of regional partners and allies, has the capability and capacity to pressure China to accept this ruling. Only the Coast Guard has the authority to support Manila's enforcement of its sovereignty and contest any further incursions. Permanently surging Coast Guard assets into the INDOPACOM region would set the environment for increased interactions between the Coast Guard and PRC, furthering U.S. national interests and greatly exploiting China's legitimacy weakness.

### **Conclusion**

Andrea Ghiselli, from the School of International Relations at Fudan University, contends, "Waging war is far less necessary to defeat an enemy than in the past. Before any shot is fired, all the economic, diplomatic and military resources of the state are deployed in order to undermine the enemy's strategy<sup>32</sup>." The Coast Guard is the best tool for the United States to employ to undermine the Chinese strategy and erode its legitimacy on the global stage. The Coast Guard presence in INDOPACOM must be expanded to enable the Coast Guard's unique authorities to be employed on a far larger scale, to strengthen alliances and enhance their organic capabilities and lastly to integrate into the existing INDOPACOM command structure strengthening the operational planning capability. Time is not on our side.

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<sup>31</sup> Euan Graham

<sup>32</sup> Jamison, Matthew "Countering China's Counter-Intervention Strategy." *The Strategy Bridge* August 11, 2020. Accessed April 18, 2021, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/8/11/countering-chinas-counter-intervention-strategy>

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