FROM THE EDITORS

As the United States Navy reportedly prepares to mount a direct challenge to China's island-building project in the South China Sea, it is appropriate to focus renewed attention on this long-standing irritant in the relationship among China, its neighbors in the region, and the United States. In "America's Security Role in the South China Sea," Andrew S. Erickson, of the Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute, in a presentation originally offered as testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in July of 2015, provides a succinct overview and analysis of the issue. He contends that "China's combination of resolve, ambiguity, activities, and deployments has corrosive implications for regional stability and international norms. That's why the United States now needs to adjust conceptual thinking and policy to stabilize the situation and balance against the prospect of negative Chinese behavior and influence."

It has long been assumed that the most likely trigger of a clash of arms between China and the United States is Taiwan. Given China's increasingly provocative behavior in the South China Sea (as well as in the East China Sea with respect to Japan), we should revisit this assumption. China's interest in these areas is not an existential one to the same extent as its well-advertised interest in Taiwan. But this makes it all the more important to develop a general understanding of the dynamics of Chinese crisis behavior across a variety of scenarios. In "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," Alastair Iain Johnston sets out to do exactly that. In a pathbreaking analysis that encompasses a growing Chinese academic literature as well as the organization and organizational culture of China's military and security bureaucracies, Johnston shows that Chinese crisis-management thinking has been shaped to a surprising extent by the tradition of American, or more broadly Western, theorizing on crises originating in the Cold War. While emphasizing that this tradition is in many ways in tension with traditional Chinese attitudes toward war, he suggests that there may be an opening here for a productive dialogue between the two nations. Alastair Iain Johnston is the Governor James Albert Noe and Linda Noe Laine Professor of China in World Affairs at Harvard University.

The recently coined military term of art "antiaccess and area-denial" (A2/AD) appears in discussions primarily of China's ability to interpose significant naval

and air power between its shores and the American military presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Jonathan Altman, in "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Growing Risk," makes the novel and important argument that the new Russian presence in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean generally raises very similar issues for the United States and its allies in that region. What remains to be seen is whether Russia will be able to establish a permanent Syrian base that will inevitably change the strategic calculus—particularly for the United States, but also notably for Israel—in a dangerously volatile part of the world. Jonathan Altman is a program analyst with Systems Planning and Analysis, Inc.

Alfred Thayer Mahan taught that a robust commercial fleet is an inseparable component of maritime power. Today it is fashionable to argue or assume that the virtual disappearance of an American merchant fleet in recent times gives the lie to this idea. But does it? In "The U.S. Merchant Marine: Back to the Future?," Christopher J. McMahon makes the case that the nation's current reliance on foreign-flagged vessels poses an unacceptable danger, both economically and strategically. Rear Admiral McMahon, U.S. Maritime Service (Ret.), is currently Emory S. Land Chair of Merchant Marine Affairs at the Naval War College.

It is no secret that military organizations tend to dislike change. In "Systems of Denial: Strategic Resistance to Military Innovation," Andrew Hill and Stephen Gerras provide an anatomy of this phenomenon in a larger context that includes innovation in business and in theories of science, and offer recommendations for overcoming it. At a time when truly paradigm-challenging thinking appears to be increasingly at risk, even in the academy (is global warming really "settled science"?), it is important to ponder these issues and their implications for professional military education. Andrew Hill and Stephen Gerras are professors in the Department of Command, Leadership, and Management of the Army War College.

If the American way of war is overwhelmingly focused on its kinetic dimension, the Chinese tend to take a more holistic approach, with special emphasis on psychological and legal instruments. But the use of law, both international and domestic, as an instrument of irregular or asymmetric warfare is not confined to nation-states. As Michael T. Palmer and J. Michael Johnson argue in "Undersea Lawfare: Can the U.S. Navy Fall Victim to This Asymmetric Warfare Threat?," activist environmental organizations of varying motivations have proved capable of posing obstacles to American naval activities, especially active sonar testing for purposes of antisubmarine warfare, that often rise above the level of mere annoyance. They suggest it is time for the Navy to treat this "lawfare" with the seriousness it deserves. Captain Michael T. Palmer is a Navy Judge Advocate General Corps officer; Rear Admiral J. Michael Johnson (Ret.) is a former naval aviator.

Finally, we are pleased to note that this column once more has a plurality of authors, with the arrival in October 2015 of the new Managing Editor of the Naval War College Press, Robert Ayer. Rob is a retired U.S. Coast Guard captain and longtime military professor at the Coast Guard Academy, and brings superb editorial skills to a demanding assignment. We trust Rob's Newport experience will be a pleasant and productive one.

IF YOU VISIT US

Our editorial offices are now located in Sims Hall, in the Naval War College Coasters Harbor Island complex, on the third floor, west wing (rooms W334, 335, 309). For building-security reasons, it would be necessary to meet you at the main entrance and escort you to our suite—give us a call ahead of time (401-841-2236).

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Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (required by 39 USC 3685, PS Form 3526-R, July 2014) of the Naval War College Review, Publication Number 401390, published four times a year at 686 Cushing Road, Newport, R.I., 02841-1207. General business offices of the publisher are located at the Naval War College, 686 Cushing Road, Newport, R.I., 02841-1207. Name and address of publisher is President, Naval War College, 686 Cushing Road, Newport, R.I., 02841-1207. Name and address of editor is Dr. Carnes Lord, Code 32, Naval War College, 686 Cushing Road, Newport, R.I., 02841-1207. Name and address of managing editor is Dr. Robert Ayer, Code 32A, Naval War College, 686 Cushing Road, Newport, R.I., 02841-1207. Owner is the Secretary of the Navy, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., 20350-1000. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and its exempt status for federal income-tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. Average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months is: (a) Total number of copies: 8,236; (b)(1) Requested subscriptions (outside Newport County): 7,222; (b)(2) Requested subscriptions (inside Newport County): 248; (c) Total requested circulation: 7,470; (d)(1) Nonrequested distribution by mail (outside Newport County): 106; (d)(3) Nonrequested copies by other classes: 81; (d)(4) Nonrequested distribution outside the mail: 363; (e) Total nonrequested distribution: 550; (f) Total distribution: 8,020; (g) Copies not distributed: 216; (h) Total: 8,236; (i) Percent requested circulation: 93%. Issue date for circulation data: Summer 2015; (a) Total number of copies: 8,347; (b)(1) Requested subscriptions (outside Newport County): 7,213; (b)(2) Requested subscriptions (inside Newport County): 281; (c) Total requested circulation: 7,494; (d)(1) Nonrequested distribution by mail (outside Newport County): 109; (d)(3) Nonrequested copies by other classes: 94; (d)(4) Nonrequested distribution outside the mail: 430; (e) Total nonrequested distribution: 633; (f) Total distribution: 8,127; (g) Copies not distributed: 220; (h) Total: 8,347; (i) Percent requested circulation: 92%. I certify that all information furnished is true and complete.

Robert Ayer, Managing Editor

AMERICA'S SECURITY ROLE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Testimony by Andrew S. Erickson before a Hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, 23 July 2015.

Allow me to share my assessment of the current situation in the South China Sea, followed by my recommendations concerning how the U.S. government should understand the situation and how it may best work to address it.

Emerging Situation

A major Chinese narrative regarding the South China Sea is one of unreciprocated restraint. But Chinese leaders have clearly had an ambitious long-term vision of some sort, backed by years of efforts, themselves based on long-standing claims encapsulated in an ambiguous "nine-dash line" enclosing virtually all of the South China Sea.

Beijing's stance regarding South China Sea sovereignty issues is categorical and steadfast. In a position paper rejecting outright the Philippines' recent initiation of international arbitration regarding their bilateral dispute, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states,

> China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands (the Dongsha [Pratas] Islands, Xisha [Paracel] Islands, the Zhongsha Islands [whose main features include Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal] and the Nansha [Spratly] Islands) and the adjacent waters.*

Despite all its rhetoric, actions, developmental efforts, and apparent preparations, however, China has repeatedly declined to disclose the precise basis for, the precise nature of, or even the precise geographical parameters of its South China Sea claims. As the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence documents, China "has never published the coordinates of the "nine-dash line" that it draws around virtually the entire South China Sea—perilously close to the coasts of its neighbors, all of

* "Summary of the Position Paper of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 7 December 2014, available at www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1217149.shtml.

whom it has disputes with. It has not "declared what rights it purports to enjoy in this area."* Beijing still has not specified whether or not it considers the South China Sea to constitute a "core interest." Given China's statements and actions to date, however, there is reason for concern that it is determined to maintain expansive claims based on unyielding invocation of the "nine-dash line."

Island Seizure History. China's military and paramilitary forces have a half-century-plus history of capturing islands and other features, many in the South China Sea. It appears that Beijing long harbored ambitions to seize significant numbers of South China Sea islands, and indeed took several occupied by Vietnam in 1974 and 1988 even though severely limited in sea and air power at that time. Such operations have not received sufficient analytical attention. In some respects, they may have been more complex than previously appreciated outside China. For example, maritime militia forces appear to have been employed in the 1974 Paracels conflict, the 2009 *Impeccable* incident, the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff, and the 2014 *Haiyang Shiyou 981* oil rig standoff.† It is important to note that in none of these cases—nor in recent Chinese cutting of the cables of Vietnamese oil and gas survey vessels or Chinese intimidation of Philippine forces at Second Thomas Shoal—did the United States intervene to stop Chinese actions.

Regarding the above-mentioned cases that occurred since the end of the Cold War, this is, in part, because Washington does not take a position on the relative validity of South China Sea countries' sovereignty claims per se. Instead, what the United States opposes consistently is (1) the use of force, or the threat of force, to resolve such disputed claims; and (2) attempts to limit freedom of navigation or other vital international system-sustaining norms.‡

Industrial-Scale Island Construction. That brings us to recent events, which I believe have precipitated today's hearing—and rightly so. In 2014, China greatly accelerated what had long been a very modest process of "island building," developing land features in the Spratlys and Paracels on a scale and [with a] sophistication

* Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C., 2015), p. 39, available at www.oni.navy.mil/.

† For Paracels, 万启光 [Wan Qiguang], 南海水产公司志 [A Record of South China Sea Fisheries Company] (Beijing: 海洋出版社 [Ocean Press], 1991), pp. 115–33. For Scarborough Shoal, Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "Tanmen Militia: China's 'Maritime Rights Protection' Vanguard," *The National Interest,* 6 May 2015, available at nationalinterest.org/. For *Haiyang Shiyou 981,* Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a 'People's War at Sea,'" China Real Time Report (中国实时报) (blog), *Wall Street Journal,* 31 March 2015, blogs.wsj.com/.

‡ Daniel R. Russel, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Remarks at the Fifth Annual South China Sea Conference" (The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 21 July 2015), available at www.state.gov/.

that its neighbors simply cannot match, even collectively over time.* "Features" is the key word here, because many were previously small rocks or reefs not legally considered "islands." Then China used some of the world's largest dredgers to build up some of the most pristine coral reefs above water with thousands of tons of sand, coral cuttings, and concrete. U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Harry Harris aptly terms China's creation a "Great Wall of Sand." It has created over two thousand acres of "land" where none remained above South China Sea waters before.† But it's what China is constructing atop this artificial edifice that most concerns its neighbors and the United States: militarily relevant facilities, including at least two runways capable of serving a wide range of military aircraft, that could allow Beijing to exert increasing influence over the South China Sea.

Beijing *itself* has stated officially that there will be military uses for the new "islands" it has raised from the sea. On 9 March 2015, China Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated that Spratly garrison "maintenance and construction work" was intended in part for *"better safeguarding territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests."*‡ Hua elaborated that construction was designed in part to *"satisfy the necessary military defense needs."* Chinese military sources employ similar wording.

The likely translation, in concrete terms:

- Better facilities for personnel stationed on the features
- Port facilities for logistics, maritime militia, coast guard, and navy ships
- A network of radars to enable monitoring of most of the South China Sea
- Air defense missiles
- Airstrips for civilian and military aircraft

Then-commander of the U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Samuel Locklear's 15 April 2015 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee supports this assessment: In addition to basing Chinese coast guard ships to expand influence over a contested area, "expanded land features down there also could eventually lead to the deployment of things, such as long-range radars, military and advanced missile systems." Locklear added: "It might be a platform for them, if

* For specific details, see "Island Tracker," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies,* amti.csis.org/.

† Subsequent to this testimony, Chinese reclamation has exceeded 2,900 acres. Department of Defense, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* (Arlington, Va.: 20 August 2015), p. 16, available at www.defense.gov/.

‡ As elsewhere in this testimony, italics are inserted by author for emphasis.

they ever wanted to establish an ADIZ [air defense identification zone] for them to be able to enforce that from."

Airstrips . . . and ADIZ? For airstrips, after structural integrity, it's length that matters most. There's no need for a three-thousand-meter runway (as China now has on Woody Island and Fiery Cross Reef) to support evacuation of personnel for medical or weather emergencies via turboprop and other civilian aircraft.* Such a runway is only needed to support a full range of military options. Building a separate taxiway alongside, as China has already done at Fiery Cross Reef, suggests plans for high-tempo, high-sortie-rate military operations. No other South China Sea claimant enjoys even one runway of this caliber on any of the features that it occupies.

One logical application for China's current activities: to support a South China Sea ADIZ. Beijing announced an ADIZ in the East China Sea in November 2013. Many nations—including the United States—have established such zones to track aircraft approaching their territorial airspace (out to twelve nautical miles from their coasts), particularly aircraft apparently seeking to enter that airspace.†

Radars on China-controlled features can form a network providing maritime/air domain awareness for the majority of the South China Sea. Fighter aircraft can allow China to intercept foreign aircraft it detects operating there, particularly those that do not announce their presence, or otherwise engage in behaviors that Beijing deems objectionable.

But while any coastal state is legally entitled to announce an ADIZ, the way in which China has done so in the East China Sea is worrisome. China threatens still-unspecified "defensive emergency measures" if foreign aircraft don't comply with its orders—orders that an ADIZ does not give it license to issue or enforce physically. This suggests that China is reserving the "right" to treat *international* airspace beyond twelve nautical miles as "*territorial* airspace" in important respects.

China's record on maritime sovereignty fuels this concern. The *vast* majority of nations agree that under international law a country with a coastline controls *only* economic resources in waters twelve to two hundred nautical miles out—and even less if facing a neighbor's coast less than four hundred nautical miles away. But China additionally claims rights to control military activities in that exclusive economic zone, as well as, apparently, in the airspace above it.

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* After this testimony was given, evidence emerged that China was constructing an airstrip on Subi Reef as well. Victor Robert Lee, "South China Sea: Satellite Imagery Makes Clear China's Runway Work at Subi Reef," *The Diplomat,* 8 September 2015.

† For a detailed explanation, see Andrew S. Erickson, "Lengthening Chinese Airstrips May Pave Way for South China Sea ADIZ," *The National Interest,* 27 April 2015.

China currently lacks long-range capable antisubmarine warfare (ASW) assets akin to U.S. P-3 and P-8 aircraft. The more "islands" it builds, even if only with helicopter pads (as opposed to full runways), the more it can increase helicopter-based ASW coverage of the South China Sea. In this way, distribution of Chinese-held features could compensate for ASW helicopters' "short legs." China could thereby attempt to start to negate one of the last remaining major U.S. Navy advantages—submarines—and possibly pursue a bastion strategy for its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) in the South China Sea.

Tipping Point. My Naval War College colleague, China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) director Peter Dutton, characterizes the aforementioned Chinese activities as a "tipping point," meriting U.S. government response. "Militarization of the newly constructed islands," which China appears determined to do, will, he argues cogently, alter strategic stability and the regional balance of power. "It will turn the South China Sea into a strategic strait under threat of land-based power."* This is part of a "regional maritime strategy . . . to expand China's interior to cover the maritime domain under an umbrella of continental control."† Dutton contends, and I agree, that Beijing's militarization of artificial islands

> sets the clock back to a time when raw power was the basis for dispute resolution. China's power play, combined with its refusal to arbitrate, its aversion to multilateral negotiations, and its refusal to enter into bilateral negotiations on the basis of equality, undermines regional stability and weakens important global institutions.‡

As bad as things are already, they could get worse—particularly if American attention and resolve are in question. In attempting to prevent China from using military force to resolve island and maritime claims disputes in the South China Sea, the United States will increasingly face Beijing's three-pronged trident designed precisely to preserve such a possibility. Maritime militia and coast guard forces will be forward deployed, possibly enveloping disputed features as part of a "Cabbage Strategy" that dares the U.S. military to use force against nonmilitary personnel.§ Such forces would be supported by a deterrent backstop that includes

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* Peter A. Dutton, "Did the Game Just Change in the South China Sea? (And What Should the U.S. Do about It?)," A ChinaFile Conversation, 29 May 2015, www.chinafile.com/.

† Peter A. Dutton, Professor and Director, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Hearing on China's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Seas,* 14 January 2014, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., available at docs.house.gov/.

‡ Dutton, "Did the Game Just Change in the South China Sea?"

§ For a Chinese description of such a concept, see "张召忠: 反制菲占岛 只需用 '包心菜' 战略" [Zhang Zhaozhong: To Counter the Philippines' Encroachment on Islands, [We] Need Simply to Employ the "Cabbage" Strategy], 环球网 [Global Network], http://mil.huanqiu.com/observation/2013-05/3971149.html.

both China's navy and its "anti-navy" of land-based antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD), or "counterintervention,"* forces, collectively deploying the world's largest arsenal of ballistic and cruise missiles. In the region, only Vietnam also has a maritime militia, and the U.S. Coast Guard is not positioned to oppose China's. Meanwhile, China's coast guard is already larger than those of all its neighbors combined, and still growing rapidly.†

More broadly, worries about China's island construction, developing force posture in the South China Sea, and accompanying official statements exemplify broader foreign concern about China's rise—that as it becomes increasingly powerful, Beijing will

- Abandon previous restraint in word and deed
- Bully its smaller neighbors
- Implicitly or explicitly threaten the use of force to resolve disputes
- Attempt to change—or else run roughshod over—important international norms that preserve peace in Asia and underwrite the global system on which mutual prosperity depends

China's combination of resolve, ambiguity, activities, and deployments has corrosive implications for regional stability and international norms. That's why the United States now needs to adjust conceptual thinking and policy to stabilize the situation and balance against the prospect of negative Chinese behavior and influence.

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

As Peter Dutton has long emphasized, the way forward for the United States is clear: *Even as China advances, we cannot retreat*. Together with the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea is a vital part of the global commons, on which the international system depends to operate effectively and equitably. Half of global commerce and 90 percent of regional energy imports transit the South China Sea alone. We cannot allow Beijing to carve out within these international waters and airspace a zone of exceptionalism in which its neighbors face bullying without recourse and vital global rules and norms are subordinated to its parochial priorities. This would set back severely what Beijing itself terms

* For an explanation of this concept published subsequent to the testimony itself, see Timothy R. Heath and Andrew S. Erickson, "Is China Pursuing Counter-intervention?," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2015).

† Andrew S. Erickson, "Did the Game Just Change in the South China Sea? (And What Should the U.S. Do about It?)," A ChinaFile Conversation, 29 May 2015, www.chinafile.com/.