

## Analyzing the Reasons behind China's Construction of Artificial Island on South China Sea

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### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, more than 80% of imports and exports are carried out through seas; therefore, it is of utmost importance for nations to have coastal positions alongside free seas. To attain more sea territories, countries such as China and UAE have attempted to construct artificial islands in the past few decades. Through construction of facilities, China has transformed eight coral islands on the South China Sea with a total area of 3.625 million m<sup>2</sup> which has been opposed by other nations around this sea including Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippine, Malaysia, and Brunei as well as other trans-regional nations such as Japan and the US. It should be remembered that adherence to the rights of other countries is a necessity for justice and fairness at regional and international levels; a principle that has been increasingly overlooked by the global, international system. Consequently, the following questions were formulated in the present study: What are the reasons that has drove Chinese policymakers to construct artificial islands on the South China Sea? What are the reasons behind the Chinese government's significant focus on this sea? Has china adhered to the international rights in this sea? Is china seeking to become a sea power?

#### 2. Theoretical Framework

In his theory of Sea Power, Mahan deemed marine and oceanic spaces influential in the formation of sea powers, global powers and control. He proposed six fundamental elements for a nation to become a sea power: 1. geographical position, 2. physical conformation, 3. extent of territory, 4. size of population, 5. character of the people, and 6. character of government (Hafeznia, 2006). Albeit, marine strategists have added conditions such as economic power, technological capabilities, socioeconomic culture and dependency on maritime trade and water resources to these elements. These features can determine whether a government/nation is willing to make use of sea powers properly (Zeinalabedin Amoughin, 2017).

The construction of artificial islands and governments' control over them do not create a right to produce new sea territories; however, since the claim to territorial

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sovereignty requires border lines on the map (Braden and Shelly, 2004), perhaps nations such as China is seeking such claims prospectively through the construction of artificial islands and placing them on political maps. The Law of the Sea is one of the oldest branches of Public International Law; yet, as it has been said that this body should be examined through developments in international rights and the fact that the Law of the sea is part of the customary law that has been gradually compiled Later (Tanaka, 2016).

### **3. Method**

The present qualitative study was conducted using the descriptive-analytical method in which library sources and websites were employed. This inquiry seeks to provide answers to the following question: What are the reasons behind China's construction of artificial islands on South China Sea? Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be formulated; the reasons behind China's construction of artificial islands are to become a superpower an increase the country's sea power in the world.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

China has extended its sea power beyond its own regions. Given China's maritime trade of over five trillion dollars per year, the Chinese government offers a number of economic justifications with respect to its military presence throughout remote waters; accordingly, any maritime insecurities could jeopardize China's economy. Subsequently, the nation believes in its rights to extensive military presence at seas. Currently, China's economic resources in the world and the motivation to assume the position of a global superpower have created a covert security competition between China and the US (Fallahi and Omidi, 2017). In 2014, the Chinese Government refused to take part in in the international court of arbitration on the Philippine's claim to a section of Spratly Islands, pointing out its rights to the South China Sea as non-negotiable "major benefits". Moreover, China's actions have been aimed at ensuring hierarchy rather than independent equality; because hierarchy has been a longstanding principle in the Asian historical international system and China has been accustomed to be positioned at the top of the hierarchy (Mitchel, 2016).

According to Robert D. Kaplan, Chinese authorities and policymakers greedily study Mahan's theory of Sea Power which indicates how global dynamics are changing; now, they follow Mahan's theory even more than Americans. They are currently building fleets designed for armed confrontations at sea; meanwhile, European navy forces look at sea power only through the law enforcement perspective. Kaplan asserts that since then, as the Chinese naval forces have grown larger and more long-range, orientation towards Mahan has also intensified in Beijing (Kaplan, 2018).

### **5. Conclusion**

Given the results of the study, Chinese authorities and policymakers' progress is based upon Mahan's theory of Sea Power. This is due to the fact that their

construction of artificial islands and claims to their sovereignty over them indicates China's adherence to sea power strategies and demands for maritime superiority within the Asia-Pacific region. A large volume of trade between China and Pacific nations are carried out in South China Sea, through the Strait of Malacca. Therefore, the strategic location of the South China Sea and Paracel and Spratly islands necessitates coastal nations to pay sufficient attention to dominion and authority over sea territories whilst taking the international Law of the Sea into account; yet regional and international controversies and conflicts can be observed among these nations which are due to Beijing's claim to sovereignty over other nations' sea territories and infringement of their rights at this sea by constructing artificial islands and demanding sea and airspace for them. Inevitably, China's actions throughout the South China Sea involves an 80% sovereignty claim and construction of artificial islands which would guide China towards becoming a sea superpower. Ultimately, the following recommendations are presented:

1. The Chinese government should realistically acknowledge the sea territories of the South China Sea's neighboring nations and do not separate them from their rightful territories;
2. Coastal nations can establish a regional cooperation organization in line with more collaboration;
3. Coastal nations should attempt to resolve their maritime issues irrespective of the views and interference of trans-regional countries.

**Keywords:** China, South China Sea, Artificial Islands, International Law of Seas, Naval Power

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