

The State of Anarchy and Security Situation in the South China Sea: Difficulties in Passing a Code of Conduct after the Scarborough Standoff¹

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1.1 Introduction

At the opening day of the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on November 8, 2012, outgoing President Hu Jintao stressed the need for China to become a maritime power in order to “safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests.” Though Hu’s concept of maritime power would be subject to many interpretations, he delivered his speech against a backdrop of increased security tensions in the South China Sea.

¹ Original version of this paper was presented at the Third International Conference on “Security Environment of the Seas in East Asia: Power Shift and Responses,” organized by the Ocean Policy Research Foundation, held at Hotel New Otani in Tokyo, Japan on December 4-5, 2012.

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To manage the simmering territorial conflicts, China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been talking about the contested issue of the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea since January 2012. However, the passage of the COC remains elusive as China still fails to fully commit on the proposed Code even as it has already completed its leadership transition in March 2013. Moreover, ASEAN members remain divided on some specific aspects of the proposed COC even as they reached consensus already on some key points of the said proposal.

During the 21st ASEAN Summit in Cambodia on November 19, 2012, regional tensions flared when the host country, a well-known China’s ally, set aside the discussion on COC and hijacked the agenda of the summit when it declared that ASEAN “would not internationalize the South China Sea from now on” – a statement that the Philippines vehemently opposed (Bland, “Regional Tensions”).

The holding in Brunei of the 46th ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting on July 1, 2013 and the 20th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Meeting on July 2, 2013 also failed to see real progress on the discussion of COC other than a general statement saying that ASEAN and China will exert best efforts “to reach an early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which will serve to enhance peace, stability and prosperity in the region” (Joint Communiqué 2013).

With the current snail pace of talks on the COC, it will take many years before China and ASEAN can reach a final decision on the proposals (Carsten “China snubs”). China’s insistence to manage the South China Sea disputes through bilateral negotiations delays the passage of the COC. It will even take the process longer if claimants become more assertive and intransigent of their sovereignty positions resulting from growing maritime nationalism in Asia. The current security situation in the South

China Sea is bound to become worse if claimants fail to reach a common ground in passing a COC soon. Under the current security situation, the South China Sea is in the state of anarchy where the rule of force rather than the rule of law prevails.

This paper describes the security situation in the South China Sea and discusses some contested issues causing this kind of situation. Unless these issues are squarely addressed by China and ASEAN beyond the rhetoric of nationalism and sovereignty, the current security situation may deteriorate and the problem of anarchy in the South China Sea may even be much harder to overcome.

2. Tensions Escalated

Security tensions in the South China Sea vividly escalated during the first half of 2012 due to increased maritime activities of claimants in the disputed waters. Increased activities are manifested in the form of enhanced sovereignty patrols, fortification of existing facilities in the occupied land features, exploration of natural gas and oil deposits, continuing procurement of naval assets, and more fishing activities in the contested body of waters. These activities were strong indications of claimants' intransigent outlooks in the maritime territorial dispute.

The second half of 2012 saw the momentary relaxation of tension in the South China Sea. But this was not caused by the decline of the aforementioned activities and the dissipation of security anxieties by claimants. Maritime security tensions only shifted from the South China Sea to the East China Sea where China and Japan are seriously entangled into a more heated and sensitive territorial disputes over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island. With the recent announcement of China to conduct maritime patrols in the South China Sea by the maritime safety administrations

of Guangdong, Hainan, and Fujian provinces and Guangxi Autonomous Region, security tensions escalated anew during the first half of 2013, particularly in the context of China's growing desire to become a maritime power ("4 provincial regions" *Xinhua*). The increasing paramilitary activities of China and ASEAN claimants in the South China Sea have indicated that security tension in the South China Sea is far from over.

3. Increased Maritime Activities in the South China Sea

3.1 Enhanced Sovereignty Patrols

The whole year 2012 and the first half of 2013 saw the intensification of sovereignty patrols of claimants in the South China Sea. Though the exact numbers of these patrols have not been publicly reported due to the lack of accurate monitoring, claimants consider them as part of their routine, but becoming more assertive, naval missions to protect what can be called as "contested sovereignty" in the South China Sea.

Enhanced sovereignty patrols in the South China Sea are manifested through the increased deployment of several patrol ships by claimants in the contested waters. Many observers believed that China's increased maritime patrols contributed tremendously to the escalation of security tensions in the South China Sea.

For example, China already deployed in 2012 at least 13 patrol ships as part of the China Maritime Surveillance (CMS) Force stationed in Guangzhou naval base ("New South China" *People's Daily Online*). This naval base is part of China's South Sea Fleet that covers the South China Sea as its area of responsibility. The South Sea Fleet accommodates most of the ships belonging to two major maritime flotillas ("China Maritime" *Sinodefence Online*).

The 7th Maritime Surveillance Flotilla is composed of patrol

ships *Zhongguo Haijian 71*, *Zhongguo Haijian 72*, *Zhongguo Haijian 73*, *Zhong Guo Hai Jian 74*, and *Zhong Guo Hai Jian 75*. The 8th Maritime Surveillance Flotilla is composed of the patrol ships *Zhongguo Haijian 81*, *Zhongguo Haijian 83*, and *Zhongguo Haijian 84*.

China also has the 9th Maritime Surveillance Flotilla stationed at the South Sea Fleet. The 9th Flotilla has the Type 052B, a multirole missile destroyer built by Jiangnan Shipyard for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy of China ("Type 052B" *Naval-technology Online*). The destroyer is akin to the Russian-built Sovremenny-class destroyer being armed with two missile launchers that can carry a total of 48 missiles.

Complimenting the South Sea Fleet in Guangzhou is the Sanya Submarine Base in Hainan. This base has a Jin-class (Type 094) nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine that China secretly launched in July 2004 but was publicly discovered via Google Earth in May 2007. The 2012 US Department of Defense report on Chinese military and security developments said that this submarine already entered full active service in the PLA Navy.

3.2 Fortification of Existing Facilities in the Occupied Land Features

Since the signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), there has been continuous improvement and fortification of existing facilities in the occupied features in the South China Sea.

In the Spratly Islands, China has dramatically improved its existing facilities in the Mischief Reef in 2012 by constructing a windmill, solar posts, a basketball court, and a concrete platform suitable for a helipad. In the Paracels, China just inaugurated the city of Sansha in Yongxing or Woody Island. Thus far, Sansha City has the most developed government facilities in the whole of the South China Sea. Its newly refurbished runway is

considered to be the thickest and the most solid in the contested area.

Taiwan repaired its excellent runway in Itu Aba in 2012. It even planned to extend the runway to 300-500 meters in order to service the landing of P-3C "Orion" maritime patrol aircraft (Cole "Taiwan's"). Though this plan was considered to be ambitious and unrealistic, it raised anxieties in the South China Sea, particularly from the Philippines.

The Philippines has fortified in 2012 its existing Coast Watch Station in Ayungin Shoal as a result of the establishment of the National Coast Watch Commission in September 2011. Due to budgetary constraints, the Philippines only made minor repairs of its makeshift barracks in its occupied reefs. Though it has plans to repair its existing runway in Pag-Asa Island, contractors backed out due to high cost of delivery of construction materials. Nonetheless, construction plans in Pag-Asa were also concerns of other claimants as the Pag-Asa Island used to have a very excellent runway that could accommodate landing of large aircrafts such as the C-130s. At present, the runway in Pag-Asa Island is in rapid state of deterioration.

Vietnam has also improved its existing facilities in Namyit Island, Pugad Island, and Lagos Island (or Southwest Cay) with the construction of additional solar panels and upgraded windmill facilities. Vietnam conducted serious maintenance activities of its runway in Lagos Island.

In Malaysia, there is a continuous improvement of facilities in Swallow Reef (or Layang Layang) having been declared by the tourism authority of Malaysia as one of the world's best diving spots. Malaysia also conducted maintenance work of its runway and renovated some rooms of its existing world-class resort in Layang Layang.

As a passive and the most benign claimant, Brunei does not occupy any facility in the Spratlys.

3.3 *Exploration of Natural Gas and Oil Deposits*

Key claimants continue to conduct natural gas and oil exploration activities in the Spratlys. Exxon Mobil, which acquired oil blocks in the Vietnamese controlled waters in the South China Sea, was quoted in June 2012 to have officially announced the presence of oil and natural gas in its exploration areas (Jegarajah "South China Sea's"). But China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) also opened for bidding in June 2012 some oil blocks being explored by Vietnam (Fabi and Chen "Analysis"). CNOOC Chairman Wang Yillin announced on November 9, 2012 during the 18th NPC that the oil company just discovered a "big" gas field in Yinggehai basin of the South China Sea" (Chen "CNOOC").

In July 2012, the Philippine Department of Energy (DOE) pushed through with the bidding of three highly prospective oil and natural gas blocks located in the disputed West Philippine Sea (WPS) off northwestern Palawan (Remo "Philippines"). Two of these blocks, particularly the one in the Reed Bank, are being claimed by China as part of its nine-dash-line position. Though Malaysia and Brunei also have high claims on some portions of natural gas and oil fields in the South China Sea, they remain low profile on oil disputes because of their already existing commercial activities.

3.4 *Continuing Procurement of Naval Assets*

Security tensions continue to rise in the South China Sea because of continuing procurement of naval assets by claimants. Aside from its routine deployment of CMSs in the South China Sea, China began using its unmanned aerial vehicles as part of its blue-water operations (Bussert "Chinese"). Taiwan's Ministry

of National Defense and the Coast Guard Administration announced in July 2012 its plan to deploy short-range anti-aircraft guns on Itu Aba (Chang "MND"). But Taiwan eventually denied the plan because of the regional controversies it created (Cole "Ministry").

After receiving on August 17, 2011 its second-hand Hamilton class cutter from the United States, President Benigno S. Aquino III announced during his third State of the Nation Address on July 23, 2012 that the country was expecting delivery of another Hamilton class cutter in August 2013. He also announced that the Philippine military already canvassed the procurement of cannons, personnel carriers and frigates (Aquino "Third"). The Philippine Department of National Defense told media on November 4, 2012 that the Philippine Navy was negotiating for acquisition of two "two-missile firing" warships from Italy and some equipment boats from Canada. The Philippine Coast Guard, on the other hand, has negotiated with Japan on the purchase of 10 patrol ships. The question remains on how the Philippine government can get money to buy all these.

It is already publicly known that Vietnam is purchasing six Kilo-class submarine from Russia. In August 2012, Vietnam reported that the first unit was already launched. The Vietnamese Navy expects the delivery of all these submarines in 2016 (Holmes "Vietnam's").

Malaysia commissioned two units of Scorpene-class submarines from France in 2009. They are currently stationed in Malaysian Naval Base in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah facing the South China Sea. Its closest neighbor, Brunei, also acquired three units of offshore patrol vessels from Germany in August 2011. These units are now stationed at Muara Naval Base also facing the South China Sea.

3.5 More Fishing Activities

Fishing activities cause tremendous security tensions in the South China Sea. Due to overlapping claims, there are also overlapping fishing activities in this body of water. Competing domestic laws on fishing activities also exacerbate the problem in the South China Sea.

In 2012, China's Ministry of Agriculture declared a fishing ban in the South China Sea from January 12, 2012 to August 1, 2012. This angered Vietnam as the ban enormously affected the livelihood of Vietnamese fishermen. When some Vietnamese fishermen ignored the ban, one CMS vessel fired a shot at one fishing craft on February 22, 2012 to enforce China's maritime law in the Paracels. On March 3, 2012, China detained 21 Vietnamese fishermen and imposed a penalty of US\$11,000 for their release. Vietnam, of course, vehemently protested China's moves.

In April 2012, China and the Philippines started a standoff in the waters of Scarborough Shoal. This issue will be discussed lengthily in the succeeding section of this paper, as this topic deserves a separate discussion.

4. Establishing a Rules-based Regime

Amidst rising security tensions in the South China Sea, the Philippines drafted an eight-page COC as early as January 2012 in order to promote a peaceful resolution of territorial conflicts in the South China Sea. Entitled "Philippine Draft Code of Conduct," it is based largely on the Philippine concept of Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship, and Cooperation (ZoPFFC) prepared for, but was set aside, at the 19th ASEAN Summit and 6th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali, Indonesia on

November 17-19, 2011.³ The Philippine draft aimed to establish a "rules-based regime" that can transform the South China Sea "from an area of dispute to a Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship, and Cooperation" ("Philippine Paper" *Nghien cuu biendong Online*).

Though China and other ASEAN members also subscribe to the general principle of the pacific settlement of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, as aptly expressed in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), they find the Philippine draft too prescriptive, if not very intrusive to the sovereign prerogatives of states.

China, in particular, regards the Philippine draft too legalistic and highly duplicative of existing international laws. Most ASEAN members likewise have expressed strong reservations on the many specific items of the Philippine draft, particularly on Article III (Joint Cooperation Area), Article IV (Joint Permanent Working Committee), Article V (Application of Part IX of UNCLOS), and Article VI (Dispute Settlement Mechanisms) (Thayer "ASEAN's").

It is for this reason that Indonesia presented its own draft COC based on six-point principles. The ASEAN ministers approved the six-point principles during their meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012. The six-point principles are the following:

1. The full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2002);
2. The guidelines for the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2011);

³ For details, see Banlaoi, Rommel C. "Philippine Solution to the South China Sea Problem: More Problems, Less Solutions?" Paper presented at the international conference on "Security Environment of the Seas in East Asia: From the East and South China Seas – Power Shift and Response," organized by the Ocean Policy Research Foundation, The Nippon Foundation, and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, held at the Marina Mandarin Hotel in Singapore on February 28-29, 2012.

3. The early conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea;
4. The full respect of the universally recognized principles of International Law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);
5. The continued exercise of self-restraint and non-use of force by all parties; and
6. The peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with universally recognized principles of International Law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

But during the foreign ministers' meeting in Cambodia, ASEAN failed to release a joint communiqué not only because of its members' lack of consensus on the proposed draft but also due to strong pressures from China. During the 21st ASEAN Summit in Cambodia, members attempted to press China to begin discussing the proposed COC but to no avail.

In fact, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying already stressed prior to the 21st ASEAN Summit that the South China Sea dispute should not overshadow the regional meeting in Cambodia. China opposed the view that the security situation in the South China Sea already deteriorated.

Fu Ying argued, "China and the countries surrounding the South China Sea have successfully controlled the dispute and not let it intensify" (Blanchard "China"). She uttered this amidst continuing security tension with the Philippines over the issue of the Scarborough Shoal.

The holding of the 22nd ASEAN Summit in Brunei saw no sign of real progress on the passage of COC. In fact, ASEAN members remain divided on their specific views of the COC. Brunei and Malaysia are quiet claimants. Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand are anxious about the COC but are not in a hurry to pass it.

Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are disinterested members to discuss the COC. Only Vietnam and the Philippines are leading the charge on the COC (Raine and Le Miere 105-150). But, with the official visit of Vietnam President Truong Tan Sang to China in June 2013, there was a fear that Vietnam's bold position on the COC may change.

5. Scarborough Shoal Standoff

While the Philippines was pushing hard for its brand of peaceful solution to the South China Sea problem, the security situation in the contested area severely deteriorated during the first six months of 2012. Security tensions in the South China rapidly escalated in April 2012 when the Philippines and China suffered a standoff in the disputed Scarborough Shoal. The standoff began on April 8, 2012 when the Philippine Navy (PN) monitored eight Chinese fishing vessels catching corals, live sharks and giant clams in the waters surrounding the Scarborough Shoal.

5.1 *The Philippine Narrative*

As part of its rules of engagement, the PN dispatched its newest ship, *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*, on April 10, 2012 in order to conduct "anti-poaching operation" in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*, the current flagship of the Philippine Republic, is a second-hand Hamilton class cutter acquired from the U.S. in 2011. This flagship inspected the said Chinese fishing vessels and planned to arrest the Chinese fishermen therein. Under Philippine laws, catching corals, live sharks and giant clams in its maritime zone is illegal.

But China reacted fervidly by sending on the same day two

China Maritime Surveillance (CMS) vessels coming from Guangzhou. The PN identified these CMS vessels as the *Zhongguo Haijian 75* and the *Zhongguo Haijian 84*. These CMS vessels are part of the largest civilian “paramilitary” maritime forces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) under its State Oceanic Administration. All CMS vessels of the PRC have the prime responsibility to enforce China’s maritime laws in its territorial waters and EEZ. China quickly deployed *Zhongguo Haijian 75* and the *Zhongguo Haijian 84* in Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Island in China) in order to “protect their fishermen” in “China’s territorial waters.” Monitored by the international media, the standoff was very tense because of the strong commitment of both countries to defend their sovereignties in the disputed shoal.

For the Philippines, China triggered the standoff by deploying the two CMS vessels in the Panatag (Bajo de Masinloc/Scarborough) Shoal (“Philippine” *The Official Gazette Online*). Since 1995, when China built a structure in the Mischief Reef being claimed by the Philippines, the PN has not experienced this level of tense situation.

In the Scarborough Shoal and in the waters within its vicinity, it was the practice of the PN to deploy its patrol ships in order to apprehend and arrest poachers and illegal fishermen. In fact, the PN routinely arrested Chinese fishermen in the Scarborough Shoal as a demonstration of sovereign control. The PRC would just send its ambassador in Manila to negotiate for the release of Chinese fishermen. Though there were minor clashes in the past between Chinese fishermen and the PN patrol personnel in Scarborough Shoal, the PRC did not deploy CMS vessels. In 1999, a Chinese fishing boat even sank after being chased by a PN patrol ship. But the PRC only filed a diplomatic protest.

Thus, it was a mammoth surprise for the Philippine government to see CMS vessels challenging the PN presence in the Scarborough Shoal. Worst, the PRC even required the PN to withdraw its flagship from the shoal as the *BRP Gregorio del*

Pilar, being a “war ship,” conveyed a hostile message to China. On the third day of the standoff, the PN withdrew the cutter on April 13, 2012 in order to undergo “re-provisioning” at Poro Point. On the same day of the PN pullout, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) deployed its “search and rescue vessel,” the *BRP Pampanga*, to “continuously enforce Philippine maritime laws” in the Scarborough Shoal. A monitoring control surveillance vessel from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources reinforced the PCG in the Scarborough Shoal.

Despite the PN withdrawal, the standoff got worse when China sent a third CMS vessel in the Scarborough Shoal. At the second week of the standoff, China already deployed four CMS vessels and at least 10 utility boats in order to protect various Chinese fishing boats numbering at least 80 (“Briefing” Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence). The Philippine government regarded the presence of all these Chinese fishing vessels in Bajo de Masinloc as “a serious violation of the Philippines’ sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.” The Philippine government even accused Chinese fishermen for violating the Philippine Fisheries Code and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (“Philippine” *The Official Gazette Online*).

The standoff spilled over to the Philippine public leading to a peaceful protest of around 200 demonstrators on May 11, 2012 in front of the Chinese Embassy in Manila. Filipinos abroad, particularly in the U.S., also did their own protest actions condemning China. The incident also reached the social media with more than a million Chinese and Filipino “netizens” lambasting each other. It even led to the hacking of government websites condemning each other’s actions and reactions in the standoff. There was even a call from the Philippines to boycott Chinese products to protest Chinese actions in the Scarborough Shoal.

5.2 *The China Narrative*

For China, however, the Philippines started the standoff when it deployed a warship “in the lagoon of Huangyan Island” to harass Chinese fishermen (“Answers” *Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines Online*). China maintains that it has all the right to fish in the waters surrounding the Huangyan Island as it discovered it, “gave it the name, incorporated it into its territory, and exercised jurisdiction over it” (“Answers” *Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines Online*). China argues that the Philippines does not have any right to arrest Chinese fishermen in China’s territorial waters.

China regarded Philippine action in the Huangyan Island as blatant form of intimidation and harassment. One Chinese authority on the South China Sea disputes explains:

The harassment on April 10th is one of 700 similar cases in the last 12 years where fishermen from Tanmen in Hainan province were arrested, robbed or assaulted by the armed forces of neighboring countries while fishing in the South China Sea, which has been their traditional fishing ground for generations. The neighboring countries have been taking advantage of China’s restraint and have seriously violated the Declaration on the Conducts of Parties in the South China Sea (Wu “Huangyan Island”).

To protect its territorial sovereignty and to enforce China’s maritime laws in Huangyan Island, China sent three CMS vessels in the area. China argued that the deployment of the vessels in the Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Island) was part of its law enforcement to protect not only its fishermen but also its maritime resources from Filipino poachers and intruders. China even constructed physical barriers to the entry point of the lagoon in the Scarborough Shoal. It also imposed a fishing ban from May 16, 2012 to August 1, 2012. The Philippine government

did not recognize this ban and imposed instead its own fishing ban covering the period May 16, 2012 to July 15, 2012.

As result of the standoff, the Chinese government expressed its disgust against the Philippine government through various non-military pressures. For the first time in history of Philippines-China relations, the Philippines was put in the headlines of many Chinese newspapers, but in a negative way. Editorials and commentaries from *Global Times*, *China Daily*, and *People’s Daily* about the Philippines were pejorative. The *Global Times* even published an editorial saying, “China should be prepared to engage in a small-scale war at sea with the Philippines” (“Huangyan” April 21, 2012). The editorial further said, “Once the war erupts, China must take resolute action to deliver a clear message to the outside world that it does not want a war, but definitely has no fear of it” (“Huangyan” April 21, 2012). Because of the emotional outburst in China, CCTV anchor He Jia mistakenly and unintentionally said, “The Philippines belongs to Chinese sovereignty. This is an indisputable fact.” The Chinese Embassy in Manila stressed that it was an honest mistake of the news anchor.

But with the negative image of the Philippines in China, many Chinese travel agencies cancelled their planned tours to the Philippines. China’s custom authorities also imposed stricter rules on the importation of bananas, pineapples, and other fruits from the Philippines. At the commemoration of the 37th anniversary of Philippines-China relations on June 9, 2012, China cancelled the visits of Shanghai Sharks, Shanghai’s ballet dance troupe, and an acrobatic/circus group slated to perform in Iloilo and Bacolod.

At present, three Chinese ships and at least 60 Chinese fishing boats remain in the Scarborough Shoal. In fact, through its civilian ships and fishing boats, China has already established an effective control of the Scarborough Shoal. There is no indication that China will pull out its ships and boats in the area, particularly in the context of China’s intention to develop

and strengthen its maritime power in the 21st century. The Philippine National Security Council even reported in June 2013 that at least 18 China's patrol ships were monitored in the waters described by the Philippine government as integral part of the West Philippine Sea.

6. China's Maritime Power Aspiration and Major Power Competition

During the 18th CPC National Congress, President Hu urged China to become a maritime power. This statement triggered a higher level of action-reaction dynamics in the South China Sea involving not only claimants but also other major powers with a tremendous stake in the security of the South China Sea.

It has been analyzed many years back that the nature of conflict in the South China Sea can be elevated to a higher level if major powers are dragged into the situation (Cossa "Security"). "Involvement" of major powers can further complicate the security situation in the South China Sea.

At present, the South China disputes have become an integral item in the strategic agenda of major powers, primarily the U.S., Australia, Japan, India, Canada, and even France. In fact, the South China Sea disputes became a hot issue among ASEAN members and major powers in the ASEAN summits and in the ARF meetings. Thus, from a merely regional security issue, the South China Sea disputes have already become a major global security concern. But China maintains its position not to "internationalize" the South China Sea conflict.

Because of the current security situation in the South China Sea, the U.S. has increased its ships and ports visits in the littoral countries. The visit of *USS George Washington*, a U.S. aircraft carrier, to the Philippines on October 24, 2012 was a

clear demonstration of US increased interest to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea. During the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2013, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced its intention to increase American military rotational presence in the Philippines.

7. Conclusion

The year 2012 and the first half of 2013 saw the escalation of security tension in the South China Sea even as China maintained that the situation remained stable and peaceful. Increased maritime activities of claimants in the disputed waters contributed to the escalation of these tensions. Increased activities, propelled by intransigence of claimants, are seen through enhanced sovereignty patrols, fortification of existing facilities in the occupied land features, exploration of natural gas and oil deposits, continuing procurement of naval assets, and more fishing activities in this contested body of water.

The Scarborough Shoal standoff that started in April 2012 between the Philippines and China was the most controversial incident that heated up the security tension in the South China Sea in 2012. China's declaration of its intention to become a maritime power at the 18th CPC National Congress on November 8, 2012 also raised speculations and fears that the security situation in the area would remain tense in part of the 2013 and beyond.

The uncertain status of the proposed COC is an indication that the security situation in the South China Sea will remain unpredictable, fragile, and risky to all parties concerned. The current security situation in the South China Sea can even be worse if claimants fail to decisively reach a common ground in willingly passing a COC in the soonest possible time. But

with the current trends of discussions on the COC, its early conclusion is a difficult endeavor. Under this situation, security tension in the South China Sea is far from over and the state of anarchy in this troubled water is bound to persist.

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