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The Sino-Vietnamese Oil Rig Crisis: Implications for the South China Sea Dispute

*By Ian Storey**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- China's deployment of the Haiyang Shiyou-981 (HYSY-981) oil rig into Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from early May to mid-July raised tensions in the South China Sea to their highest levels since the end of the Cold War and reinforced existing negative trends.
- The decision to dispatch the drilling platform provides further evidence that Beijing's policy in the South China Sea is increasingly centralized, coordinated and proactive. China's aim appears to be to achieve dominance within the nine-dash line by incrementally advancing its sovereignty and jurisdictional claims but without provoking military conflict. In doing so it also seeks to achieve regional primacy by undermining credibility in America's security commitments to its friends and allies.
- China's dispatch of HYSY-981 severely ruptured relations with Vietnam and called into question the efficacy of Hanoi's policy to manage its maritime disputes with Beijing.

- The oil rig incident illustrated how the South China Sea dispute has become a growing source of contention in US-China relations. US officials have become more critical of China's behaviour and blame Beijing for raising tensions. China rejects US criticism and accuses it of interfering in the dispute and using it as pretext to "rebalance" to Asia. Disagreements between the two countries over the legality of military surveillance activities in China's EEZ complicates the dispute.
- The ten-week crisis once again highlighted the ineffectiveness of conflict management efforts by ASEAN and China. The 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) has yet to be implemented and China is deliberately prolonging discussions on the proposed Code of Conduct (CoC). HYSY-981 posed a test to ASEAN unity but unlike in 2012 the organization was able to present a united front.

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INTRODUCTION

China's deployment of the oil rig HYSY-981 into Vietnam's claimed EEZ between 2 May and 15 July triggered a major crisis in Sino-Vietnam relations and raised tensions in the South China Sea to their highest levels since the end of the Cold War. This article examines what the HYSY-981 crisis tells us about China's policy in the South China Sea, the deleterious impact it has had on Vietnam-China relations, why the dispute is a growing area of dissension between Washington and Beijing and how it has reinforced negative trends that highlight the ineffectiveness of the ASEAN-China conflict management process and further dimmed the prospects of a negotiated settlement.

CHINA'S POLICY AIMS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Over the past few years, China's renewed assertiveness in the South China Sea has been attributed either to the absence in Beijing of a centralized policy on maritime disputes —resulting in a lack of coordination and inter-agency competition—or as a reaction to the “provocative” actions of Vietnam and the Philippines.¹ In the light of HYSY-981, however, these explanations are no longer valid. Prior to the oil rig's deployment, Vietnam had not undertaken any “provocative” activities. The presence of a large flotilla of civilian maritime patrol vessels, warships and fishing trawlers to act as a protective cordon around HYSY-981 suggests a high degree of inter-agency cooperation. Moreover, it is inconceivable that the decision to send the rig was not taken at the highest levels of the Chinese government given the inevitable negative reactions from Vietnam and other regional states. Instead, HYSY-981 is illustrative of a policy that is increasingly centralized, coordinated and proactive, and which reflects President Xi Jinping's decisive influence over foreign and domestic affairs.

Beijing's aims in the South China Sea have also become clearer. At one level, China's actions over the past few years are designed to incrementally advance its territorial sovereignty and jurisdictional claims to resources and navigation within the nine-dash line, with the ultimate intention of achieving dominance within that line but without provoking a conflict. At the same time, China's actions in both the South and East China seas also seem aimed at undermining US credibility and hence power in Asia by demonstrating to regional states the limitations of Washington's security commitments and its unwillingness to risk a military clash with China over disputed rocks.² This in turn would allow China to advance its power and influence across the region more broadly.

¹ International Crisis Group, *Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)*, Asia Report No. 223, 23 April

² Hugh White, “Explaining China's behaviour in the East and South China Seas”, *The Interpreter*, 22 May 2014.

Beijing denies all blame for rising tensions in the South China Sea and insists that responsibility lies with the Southeast Asian claimants, especially Vietnam and the Philippines, as well as the United States and Japan. A common theme in the Chinese narrative is that Beijing exercises “restraint and patience” in the South China Sea.³ President Xi’s assertion during the oil rig crisis that “We will never stir up trouble, but will react in the necessary way to the provocations of countries involved” put the onus for rising tensions on the other claimants.⁴

In fact, however, few regional states view China as blameless, and its activities have led some to strengthen their strategic ties with America. Moreover, China’s attempts to push its claims have damaged its international image and created anxiety across the region. A poll conducted in mid-2014, for instance, found that in the Philippines 93 percent of respondents were concerned about conflict with China, 85 percent in Japan, 84 percent in Vietnam and 66 percent in Malaysia – even in China, 62 percent of respondents were concerned.⁵ And yet Beijing seems prepared to absorb the reputational costs and press on with its assertive policy confident that the other claimants will avoid confrontation with China for three reasons. First, as they become more economically dependent on China the costs of challenging its claims rise.⁶ Second, due to its superior numbers of military and paramilitary vessels, China can increasingly bring coercive pressure to bear on the other claimants. Third, the United States will not intervene militarily on their behalf because it does not take a position on competing sovereignty claims and because a war with China over the atolls is not in its national interests. The Chinese leadership must also have taken note of the Obama administration’s more cautious foreign policy and reluctance to employ military power in response to international hotspots such as Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. As China feels that time is ultimately on its side, there is little prospect of it adopting a more accommodative posture.

As China grows stronger, it seems less willing to be beholden to legal norms enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an agreement China itself ratified in 1996. According to Yun Sun, some Chinese legal experts have argued that since China’s “historical rights” predate UNCLOS, “it cannot retroactively be applied to supersede China’s sovereignty, sovereign rights and maritime administrative rights formed throughout history”.⁷ When a State accedes to UNCLOS, any prior claims to “historical rights” are extinguished. But as the former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, has warned, “A rising China is seeking to assert its sea boundary claims. It is naïve to believe that a strong China will accept the conventional definition of what parts of

³ “China military warns of confrontation over seas”, *Reuters*, 21 April 2012; “Better to be safe than sorry”, *China Daily*, 30 July 2012.

⁴ “Xi says China won’t stir trouble in South China Sea”, *Reuters*, 31 May 2014.

⁵ “Asian Nations’ Fears of War Elevated as China Flexes Muscle, Study Finds”, *Wall Street Journal*, 14 July 2014.

⁶ Bonnie Glaser and Deep Pal, “Is China’s Charm Offensive Dead?”, *China Brief* 14, Issue 15, 31 July 2014.

⁷ Yun Sun, “China’s New Calculations in the South China Sea”, *Asia-Pacific Bulletin* (East-West Center), 10 June 2014.

the sea around it are under its jurisdiction.”⁸

VIETNAM-CHINA RELATIONS IN CRISIS

The deployment of HSY-981 triggered the gravest crisis in Sino-Vietnamese relations since the normalization of relations in 1991, and arguably since their armed forces clashed along the border in 1979 and in the Spratlys in 1988. Hanoi immediately condemned the presence of HSY-981 as a violation of its sovereignty and Vietnamese attempts to challenge the flotilla surrounding it resulted in hundreds of ramming incidents.⁹ Peaceful anti-China protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were followed by attacks on foreign-owned factories which led to the deaths of five Chinese citizens. Although no lives were lost at sea during the ten-week standoff, the large number of skirmishes between vessels of both sides could have resulted in an exchange of gunfire and an unintended escalation of the crisis.

As noted earlier, HSY-981 was meant to reinforce China’s jurisdictional claims in the South China Sea. Yet in one sense China’s decision was puzzling because in the 12 months prior to May, Sino-Vietnamese relations had been quite cordial, certainly when compared to the fractious relationship between China and the Philippines. Vietnam and China had exchanged high-level visits—President Truong Tan Sang to Beijing in June 2013 and Premier Li Keqiang to Hanoi in October—during which the two sides restated their commitment to peace and stability in the South China Sea. Despite the rhetoric, however, Vietnam remained wary of China. In his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2013, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung alluded to the disconnect between China’s attempts to reassure its Southeast Asian neighbours, and its assertive activities in the South China Sea when, without naming China, he remarked that “Somewhere in the region, there have emerged preferences for unilateral might, groundless claims, and actions that run counter to international law and stem from imposition and power politics.”¹⁰ Nguyen’s concerns proved prescient.

In managing its dispute with China, Vietnam has been pursuing five strategies simultaneously: first, by holding regular dialogue with China via government, party and military exchanges; second, as a member of ASEAN, Vietnam has pushed China to implement the DoC and negotiate a CoC; third, Vietnam has sought to “internationalize” the problem by raising it at regional and international forums and by hosting academic conferences; fourth, Vietnam has accelerated its defence modernization programme with

⁸ Lee Kuan Yew, “Past key to understanding China’s territorial claims”, *Straits Times*, 29 March 2014.

⁹ “China accuses Vietnam of ramming its ships in disputed waters”, *Straits Times*, 8 June 2014.

¹⁰ Building Strategic Trust for Peace, Cooperation and Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific Region: Nguyen Tan Dung, Keynote Address, Shangri-La Dialogue, 1 June 2013.

an emphasis on improving the military's air and naval capabilities to deter China and defend its territorial claims; and fifth, by diversifying the country's foreign policy and signing "strategic/comprehensive partnerships" with a broad range of countries such as the United States, China, Japan, India and Russia.

HYSY-981 has called into question the efficacy of those strategies. According to Vietnam, when the crisis broke, China refused to discuss the matter through diplomatic, party or military channels. When the first high-level meeting did take place—between Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh in June—China berated Vietnam for "hyping" the issue and called on it to stop harassing Chinese vessels.¹¹ A hotline between the two countries established in 2013 for exactly this kind of crisis situation was apparently not utilized. Vietnam persuaded its fellow ASEAN members to issue a statement of serious concern on 10 May, but this did little to ameliorate tensions. Vietnam's recently acquired military hardware—including sophisticated jet fighters, submarines and frigates from Russia—failed to deter Beijing from dispatching the rig, and once it began drilling, Vietnam was keen to avoid a clash with China's superior air force and navy. Instead, Hanoi relied on its coast guard which, outnumbered and outgunned by its Chinese counterpart, looked on helplessly as the rig continued to operate. And while Vietnam's policy of forging relationships with a wide range of countries has no doubt paid economic dividends, during the crisis it was painfully apparent that Vietnam was on its own.

The HYSY-981 incident also exposed fissures within the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) on the best way to deal with China. Although decision-making within the CPV is notoriously opaque, several analysts have noted the heated debates within the Party between those who have used the crisis to advocate for a harder line against China and a closer relationship with America, and those who remain distrustful of Washington's intentions and prioritize closer relations with China for historical and ideological reasons as well as geopolitical realities.¹² No doubt these heated debates will continue until and even beyond the all-important Party Congress in 2016. Yet Vietnam seems to have little choice but to continue with the same strategies. Perhaps the only additional strategy it can pursue is to follow the Philippines' lead and mount a legal challenge to China's claims at the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the dispute resolution body established under UNCLOS. During the crisis Vietnamese leaders had suggested that they were actively considering taking China to international legal arbitration, but once the rig was removed such talk dissipated. Nevertheless, it remains an option, and one that Hanoi will almost certainly reconsider should China send another oil rig into its EEZ.

In late August, Vietnamese Politburo member Le Hong Anh visited Beijing in an effort to mend fences. Although both sides promised to repair relations and avoid actions that

¹¹ "China scolds Vietnam for 'hyping' South China Sea oil rig row", *Reuters*, 18 June 2014.

¹² Alexander Vuving, "Did China Blink in the South China Sea?", *The National Interest*, 27 July 2014; Zachary Abuza, "Vietnam Buckles under Chinese Pressure", *Asia Times Online*, 29 July 2014.

would “complicate” the dispute, neither side made any concessions, and within a matter of days Hanoi had accused China of violating its sovereignty by conducting tourist cruises in the Paracels and harassing Vietnamese fishermen.¹³ Meanwhile China’s state-run press was warning Vietnam not to “play tricks” and urged it to recognize Beijing’s expansive claims in the South China Sea.¹⁴ Relations are currently stable—until the next crisis.

A GROWING SOURCE OF CONTENTION IN US-CHINA RELATIONS

America is not a party to the South China Sea dispute but it is a significant stakeholder. In 2010 the United States declared the sea to be “pivotal” to regional security and that it had a “national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia’s maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea”.¹⁵ As a recent report argues, America must help address problems in the area in order to achieve its goals of “diminishing tensions, preventing the use of military force by all parties, protecting the lawful rights of the international community, encouraging steps to reconcile the various claimants, and maintaining credibility with all parties”.¹⁶ Washington must do so, the report argues, without feeding the Chinese narrative that US actions are part of a wider strategy to contain it, or encouraging the Southeast Asian claimants to engage in provocative behaviour. Most importantly, the South China Sea dispute should not be viewed as the beginning of “an incipient cold war with China” nor should it be seen as the “central strategic issue” in US-China relations.

While the dispute is not yet the “central strategic issue” in the world’s most important bilateral relationship, it is a growing source of contention between Washington and Beijing. Since the beginning of the year, and in a departure from past practices, the US has increasingly pointed the finger of blame at China. In February, senior US officials accused China of fuelling tensions, criticized fishing regulations introduced by Hainan Island authorities in January, warned Beijing against establishing an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the South China Sea, backed the Philippines’ legal arbitration, and for the first time explicitly challenged the legality of China’s nine-dash line.¹⁷ In May the State Department described the deployment of HYSY-981 as

¹³ “China wants to mend ties with Vietnam: Xinhua”, *Thanh Nien*, 28 August 2014.

¹⁴ Ke Xiaozhai, “Hanoi should give up on opportunism”, *Global Times*, 4 September 2014.

¹⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton, Remarks at Press Availability, 23 July 2010, Hanoi, Vietnam.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Bader, Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael McDevitt, *Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective*, The Foreign Policy Brief, Brookings Institute, Washington D.C., August 2014, p. 8.

¹⁷ “Territorial claims: US Asia-Pacific commander lauds Manila’s approach”, *Today*, 6 February 2014; “U.S. could change military posture if China expands air defense zone”, *Kyodo*, 1 February 2014. According to Danny Russel, “Any use of the ‘nine dash line’ by China to claim maritime rights not based on claimed land features would be inconsistent with international law”. Danny Russel, Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department

“provocative”, “destabilizing” and “aggressive”.¹⁸ America has openly criticized China for undermining international norms through its actions in the South (and East) China Sea. For example, the US State Department described China’s attempts to block the resupply of Filipino Marines on Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratlys in March 2014 as “inconsistent” with freedom of navigation, while William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State, has highlighted that how the South China Sea dispute is handled “reveals whether the threat of force or the rule of law will govern disputes and whether the same rules will apply to big and small countries alike”.¹⁹ According to Danny Russel, Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, China should hold itself to “a high standard of behavior” and not “wilfully disregard diplomatic and other peaceful ways of dealing with disagreements” in favour of “economic and physical coercion” which is “destabilizing and dangerous”.²⁰ In order to improve the situation, the US has advocated the full implementation of the DoC, the conclusion of a comprehensive and effective CoC and a freeze on “problematic activities” that have raised tensions.²¹

China has bristled at these criticisms and its state-run media has regularly castigated America for “meddling” in the dispute, exaggerating threats to freedom of navigation and using the dispute as a pretext to “rebalance” to Asia. Chinese officials have also accused Washington of hypocrisy for criticising China for not abiding by UNCLOS when America has not yet ratified the agreement.²² China has also challenged the US position that it is a neutral party in the dispute because it provides the Philippines with capacity-building support and intelligence. When the US proposed a freeze on building activities in the South China Sea, Chinese officials promptly rejected it as interference, said they could do whatever they wanted on the disputed atolls and announced the construction of five lighthouses in the Paracels.²³

Even as Washington and Beijing disagree on how best to reduce tensions, a perennial problem between the two countries concerning military surveillance activities in China’s EEZ is heating up and becoming conflated with the South China Sea dispute. While the US regards such activities as permissible under UNCLOS, China views them as

of State, Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, 5 February 2014.

¹⁸ Daily Press Briefing, Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, US State Department, Washington D.C., 6 May 2014; Daily Press Briefing, Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, US State Department, Washington D.C., 20 June 2014

¹⁹ Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, US Department of State, Washington D.C., 31 March 2014; William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State, Keynote Address at the Asia Society of Policy Institute Launch, New York, 8 April 2014.

²⁰ The Future of U.S.-China Relations, Testimony, Daniel R. Russel, Assistant Secretary, Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington D.C., 25 June 2014.

²¹ Daniel R. Russel, Assistant Secretary of State, Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, 28 July 2014.

²² “Beijing ‘consistent’ on S. China Sea: FM”, *China Daily*, 1 March 2012; “Xinhua accuses Clinton of ‘meddling’ in S. China Sea row”, *Straits Times*, 15 July 2012; “Clearing the sea of troubles”, *China Daily*, 4 May 2013.

²³ “China to build lighthouses on 5 Isles in defiance of US calls”, *Reuters*, 7 August 2014.

provocative and illegal (even though China itself gathers military intelligence in the EEZ of foreign States, as it did off Hawaii in July during US-led Rim of the Pacific multilateral naval exercises in which the Chinese navy itself participated, and again in September to monitor US-led exercises off Guam).²⁴ As China has beefed up its naval presence on Hainan Island, the US has stepped up its surveillance activities—especially of Chinese submarines—in the South China Sea bringing the armed forces of both countries into close proximity. An incident on 19 August in which a Chinese fighter jet intercepted a US P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft in international airspace near Hainan led to mutual recriminations: the US accused the Chinese pilot of dangerous and unprofessional behaviour, while China charged America with undermining regional stability and called on it to end its surveillance mission, a call Washington rejected. Such encounters raise the risk of a US-China military clash and further complicate the South China Sea dispute.

INEFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The HYSY-981 crisis has again highlighted the ineffectiveness of efforts by Southeast Asian states and China to better manage the conflict in the South China Sea let alone move towards a settlement of the dispute.

Since ASEAN and China agreed on a set of guidelines to implement the DoC in 2011, the two sides have been discussing joint cooperative projects in areas such as scientific research, search and rescue and tackling transnational threats. To date, however, none of these projects has been implemented. As discussions continue, and tensions ratchet up, the relevance of the DoC is increasingly being called into question. Since it was issued in 2002, most of the claimants have, at one time or another, violated the spirit of the agreement, if not the letter. But China's recent behaviour has been particularly troubling: its attempts to besiege Philippine Marines on Second Thomas Shoal in March; its deployment of HYSY-981; and revelations in May that it is undertaking extensive reclamation works on six atolls in the Spratlys all contravene the "self-restraint" clause in Article V. And while China could technically argue that it has not "inhabited" any "uninhabited" atolls since the DoC was signed, its presence at Scarborough Shoal since May 2012, and its actions to prevent Filipino fisherman from entering the shoal, clearly amounts to a de facto occupation.

The non-binding DoC calls on the parties to negotiate a binding CoC which ASEAN hopes will "promote trust and confidence, prevent incidents, and manage incidents should they occur" and thus create a "conducive environment of the eventual resolution of the

²⁴ "Chinese spy ship lurks around U.S.-led Pacific naval drills", *Washington Post*, 21 July 2014; "Chinese ship spies on Valiant Shield, and that's OK with US", *Stars and Stripes*, 22 September 2014.

disputes”.²⁵ After China had stonewalled discussions for over a year, formal consultations began in September 2013 and have continued into 2014. Although ASEAN leaders have repeatedly called for expedited talks leading to the “early conclusion” of the CoC, China has resisted these calls, insisting that it is in “no rush” to conclude the code. China’s lack of haste is understandable: it would clearly not be in Beijing’s interests to sign an agreement that would proscribe the kinds of activities it has been using to press its sovereignty and jurisdictional claims and achieve dominance within the nine-dash line. As Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario observed, “We think China is trying to stay ahead of the CoC. We think that they have an assertive agenda that they are trying to complete before they sit down and negotiate a CoC.”²⁶ In all likelihood, therefore, China will seek to prolong the CoC talks for as long as possible and to ensure that the final agreement is largely symbolic and does not limit its freedom of action in the South China Sea. Another round of talks on the code is due in Bangkok in October.

A Philippine initiative designed to both manage *and* resolve the dispute was unveiled at the ASEAN Regional Forum in August, but predictably failed to gain traction. Manila’s “triple action” plan called for a freeze on tension-generating activities (echoing the US proposal), full implementation of the DoC and a CoC, and the settlement of disputes through international legal arbitration. However, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi immediately rejected the idea on the grounds that the Philippines had already jumped to step three with its 2013 submission to ITLOS which challenges the legality of the nine-dash line, and also because it would “disrupt” talks on the CoC.²⁷ The Philippines responded that the three steps should be taken simultaneously, not consecutively. Wang called on the Philippines to drop its legal challenge and proposed a “dual track” approach in which China holds sovereignty negotiations with each of the claimants on a one-on-one basis, while ASEAN and China discuss conflict management mechanisms. However, Wang’s idea broke no new ground as this has been China’s stated policy since the late 1990s.

Earlier in the year the Philippines had met a 30 March deadline to submit legal arguments and evidence—known as a Memorial—in support of its 2013 submission. The Arbitral Tribunal, which is examining the case, subsequently gave China until 15 December 2014 to submit a counter-Memorial. Beijing immediately reiterated that it did not recognize the jurisdiction of the Tribunal and would not participate in the arbitral process.²⁸ A ruling, which will be legally binding but not enforceable, is expected in 2016; China will almost certainly ignore an unfavourable decision.

For ASEAN, the oil rig crisis presented another test of its unity. However, unlike in July 2012, when it failed to issue a final communique because Cambodia refused to include

²⁵ Chairman’s Statement on the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Sessions, 9-10 August 2014, Naypyitaw, Myanmar.

²⁶ “Philippines says China moving to occupy disputed reef”, *Reuters*, 4 September 2013.

²⁷ “Manila pushes on with case over disputed waters”, *Straits Times*, 12 August 2014.

²⁸ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Regular Press Conference, 4 June 2014.

Philippine and Vietnamese concerns at recent developments in the South China Sea, it passed. At its 24th Summit on 10-11 May—a week after the deployment of HYSY-981—, at Vietnam’s request, ASEAN issued a stand-alone statement which, for the first time since the 1995 Mischief Reef Crisis, expressed “serious concerns” at the situation in the South China Sea. Perhaps more significantly it was the first time ASEAN acknowledged that the Paracels dispute affected the peace and stability of the entire region.²⁹ However, the statement did not single China out for criticism, nor did it mitigate the crisis. Absent a resolution of the dispute, ASEAN unity—and hence its credibility and centrality in the regional security architecture—will continue to be tested.

CONCLUSION

The HYSY-981 incident demonstrated that under President Xi, China is determined to proactively enforce its maritime claims even at the expense of damaging regional relations and pushing countries closer to the United States. Beijing calculates that as its military power grows, and the Southeast Asian states become economically more dependent on China, they will eventually accede to its claims and that a risk-averse and overstretched America will not intervene. This is a risky strategy, however, as Southeast Asian states will resist any erosion of their sovereignty and sovereign rights in their EEZs. Moreover, if history is any guide to the future, the United States will robustly defend freedom of navigation rights in the South China Sea, including military surveillance activities.

The HYSY-981 crisis has passed and tensions have subsided for the time being. But they can be expected to surge again if and when China deploys one of its drilling rigs into Vietnamese or Philippine-claimed EEZs.

²⁹ ASEAN Foreign Minister’s Statement on the Current Developments in the South China Sea, Naypyitaw, 10 May 2014.

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