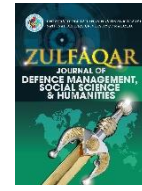




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CHINA'S HYBRID WARFARE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Sarang Joshi^{a,*}, S. Inderjit^b,

^a Indian Navy, Student at Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College, Batch 49:2020

^b Faculty of Defence Studies and Management, National Defence University of Malaysia

*Corresponding author: sjoeqwerty@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of nuclear weapons and increased international impetus on human rights, the likelihood of a full-blown war between actors seems less likely. Therefore, it is apparent that concepts of war would again transform to suit a more acceptable form – Hybrid Warfare. The paradigm of Hybrid Warfare aims to exploit various domains traditionally not associated with war synergistically. The acts undertaken in these domains are calculated to be below a certain threshold and offer plausible deniability, which, therefore, cannot be classified as outright acts of war. Furthermore, these acts are exploited in a 'Grey Zone' – where delimitations between war and peace are not earmarked or clear. The disputed region of the South China Sea, wherein territorial and maritime disputes exist among several claimants, forms an ideal Grey Zone. Dominion over this region would address China's military, Economic, Energy and Food Security needs. Thus, in an effort towards dominating the South China Sea, China has been employing numerous means such as Diplomatic Manoeuvres, Economic Intimidation, Military Force and Miscellaneous Subversions. When analysed in unison, these acts undoubtedly reveal a Hybrid Warfare character.

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Introduction

Given the anarchic nature of the contemporary international system, in realist views, the power commanded by a state is directly proportional to its influence in regional and global realms. Realists further tend to see security as a derivative of power: an actor with enough power to reach a dominating position would acquire security as a result (Buzan, 1991). Therefore, if power provides a state with a notion of security, then it becomes a primary object of achievement. Power in International Relations allows actors to achieve their goals, and if successful, it makes other governments do what they might not otherwise have wanted to do. Power is necessary not only for survival in a world of uncertainty but also for achieving ambitions beyond survival (Booth, 2014). Until the middle of the 20th century, power was generally equated with military might, and the instrument of war was used often to coerce others. However, the advent of Nuclear Weapons, which assured mutual destruction, brought about an unprecedented era of peace between the two superpowers of the time. While they were busy attempting to establish hegemony over the world order, essential milestones were being achieved by the human race. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Genocide Convention of 1948 have been instrumental in shaping human stance towards war, as we see it today. After the Soviet Union crumbled, the UN Human Security Agenda (1994), the establishment of the International Criminal Court (1998), the UN is endorsing of Responsibility to protect principles (2005), Globalization and Capitalism further influenced nations to decry war.

Additionally, the immense costs of waging a conventional war coupled with the risk of a nuclear holocaust resulted in war no longer being a profitable affair. Nevertheless, states will continue to seek power as long as they associate it with security and desire to gain a more significant influence. Although states will try to advance their power at the cost of rivals, waging war, in the true sense, would not be an astute method towards the achievement of that goal (Booth, 2011). This implies that war as an instrument of coercion is no longer suitable in its traditional form. However, imagining a world free of war would be imprudent. So, if war as we know it is no longer fashionable, a metamorphosis of this phenomenon is inevitable. The answer to this impending transformation of war lies in how Clausewitz defined the term – War is a mere continuation of politics by other means (Clausewitz, Howard, & Paret, 1989). Due to the human race's technological, economic and philosophical advancements, these other means have surpassed the traditional military domain. As per Liang and Xiangsui (1999), the impact of human rights, consciousness and morality of warfare pushes the notion of confinement of war only to the military domain towards the brink of oblivion. Among prominent world actors, warfare would not be restricted to gruesome battlegrounds but would expand to several domains – economic, cultural, religious, political, diplomatic, and military. These domains pave the way towards the emergence of a new form of warfare termed Hybrid Warfare.

Hybrid Warfare

It is intriguing to observe that glimpses of Hybrid Warfare have been in existence since time immemorial. *Kautilya's* description of various types of war in his book *Arthshastra* bear a stark similarity to Hybrid methodologies. The use of guerrilla tactics, asymmetric manoeuvres, propaganda measures, covert support to adversaries, political and economic intimidation has been used innumerable times since the Peloponnesian wars. However, having been around for a long time, the modern advent of technologies coupled with the human stance on war has reinvigorated this interest in the modern world. The fallout of the 2006 Israel Hezbollah crisis fascinated the academic circles the world over, leading to a revived interest in studying Hybrid Warfare. In this conflict, Israel suffered more casualties per Arab fighter than any of its earlier wars (Biddle & Friedman, 2008). The events of 18 March 2014, when the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean Peninsula in a practically bloodless manoeuvre, President Putin's Hybrid Tactics displaying strategic and tactical masterclass, left the world astonished. Western powers watched the happenings unfold, struggling to comprehend the synergised application of Russia's all elements of national power. This included a slow military build-up, propaganda for support to join the Russian Federation and the famous referendum in which 95% of the population voted in favour (Morris, 2014). Construed together, the synchronised application of information warfare, economic intimidation, irregular warfare tactics, political insurrection, and eventually military force in a hybrid form, focusing on a specific strategic goal, resulted in a conclusive success surpassing Moscow's expectation (Birnbaum, 2015). Hybrid Warfare, therefore, aims to exploit the efficient embodiment of various elements encompassing political, economic, ethnocultural, diplomatic, information/ cyberspace, media, operational and strategic domains in formulating and executing a war plan that would empower actors to achieve their interests without outright use of military force. A peculiarity of these Hybrid Tactics lies in their employment. They are always calculated to be below a certain threshold and are accompanied by an attribute of plausible deniability. This makes a full-scale response from an adversary significantly tricky. Due to these characteristics of Hybrid Tactics, it is clear that these actions would not classify as major hostile acts; however, their ignorance as routine skirmishes during peace would be perilous. An essential facet of Hybrid Warfare is vagueness which arises from utilising the blurred boundaries of peace and war in an environment called Grey Zones.

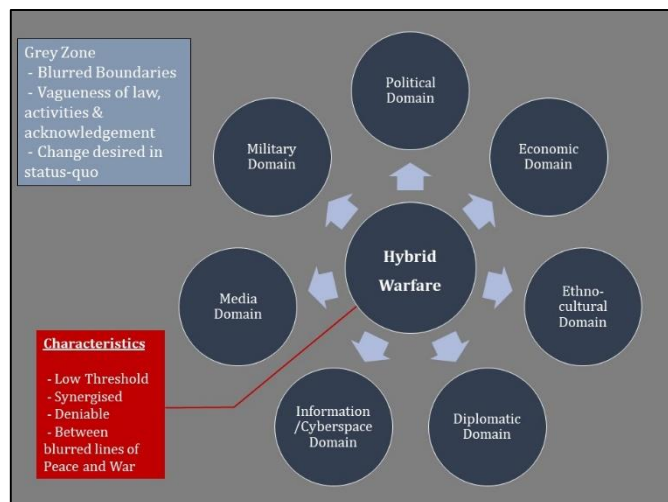


Fig. 1: Domains of Hybrid Warfare
(Biddle & Friedman, 2008)

Grey Zones

As of 2015, a total of 124 countries in the world were involved in territorial disputes, which comprised 105 different territories (Galka, 2017). Many of these disputes are likely to be resolved by peaceful means, and until such a resolution is possible, nations would try to maintain a status-quo over the region. Insofar as it seems desirable to attempt to change the status-quo, methods short of major war, like diplomacy, subversion, surrogate war or carping and whining, would provide the possible means (Mueller, 1989). Therefore, a disputed region where one or more disputants is determined to change the status-quo by non-peaceful means short of a significant war makes it a Grey Zone. This offers a variety of possibilities to an aggressor, which due to the precarious nature of the prevailing environment, do not cross the brink of war, resulting from the vagueness of law, activities and acknowledgement. Treading on the boundaries of peace and war, Hybrid Warfare tactics undeniably offer expansionist regimes an ideal methodology to unilaterally change the status quo in Grey Zones.

The South China Sea – A Geopolitical Arena Ripe for Hybrid Warfare

The South China Sea spans about 3.5 million KM² and is one of the significant disputed regions in the world. Control over Spratly and Paracel islands forms the crux of this dispute. Sovereignty over the Paracels is contested by Vietnam and China, and those over the Spratlys by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and China. Incongruities among these nations towards presenting their arguments for dominion over the islands include historical discovery, continuous occupation, and varied interpretations of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982), which all the disputants are signatories to and have ratified. Article 121(3) of UNCLOS states that rocks that cannot sustain

human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or Continental Shelf. However, the consequences arising from islands that satisfy Article 121 of UNCLOS would enable the disputants to claim a further share of EEZ and Continental Shelf. Moreover, the Spratly Islands are located at the geographic centre of the South China Sea, making controlling the area a strategic inducement. According to Wu Shicun (2016), two primary issues are likely to increase the tension between the disputants: first, resources in the waters and the seabed; and second, the importance of the South China Sea to security and trade in Asia, and even around the world. To further complicate the picture, China claims sovereignty over approximately 90% of the entire expanse of this sea, based on its self-coined philosophy of 'Special Historic Rights'. The Nine-Dash Line referred to as the U-shaped line by the Chinese, originates near the International Maritime Boundary of China and Vietnam, stretching south to approximately 2000 KM from mainland China, making a U-shape and culminating at the convergence of the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea. The ludicrous assertion of 'Special Historic Rights' over the area enveloped by the Nine-Dash Line infringes upon the EEZ of all the disputants and Indonesia, whose EEZ off Natuna Islands are also partly engulfed. Since the turn of the century, it has been intriguing to notice a shift in China's approach to this dispute. China has used varied elements to disturb the status quo of the region, establish a firm hold over the disputed territories, and strengthen its claim over the Nine-Dash Line. The complexity offered by this region has made it possible for China to carefully tread this Grey Zone by efficiently calculating actions that navigate between the dubious lines of peace and war.

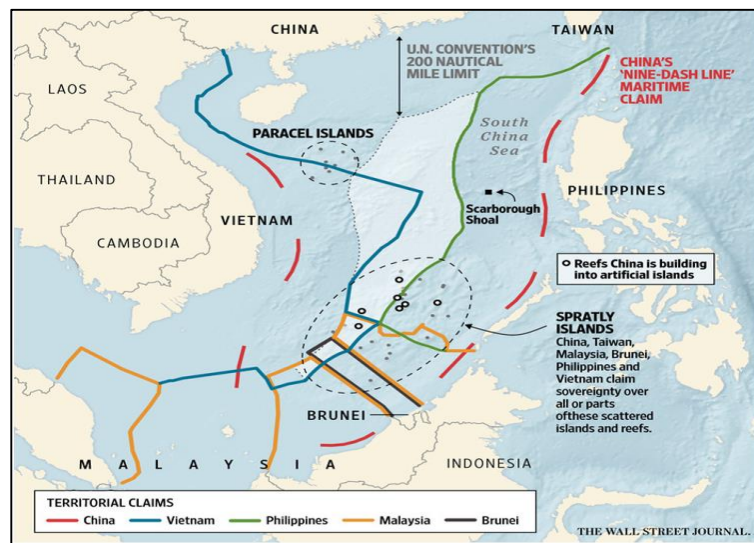


Fig. 2: China's Nine-Dash Line and Maritime Zones of the Littoral States (Black, 2018)

South China Sea – Why Change the Status-Quo?

China's desire to change the prevailing status quo in the South China Sea is directly associated with the region being prioritised in its National Security Policy. Chinese claims over this area have been prevailing since the formation of the People's Republic. These claims have only become more vociferous today, with the Chinese Defence White Paper in 2019 stating that the South China Sea was an "inalienable" part of its territory and that China "exercises its national sovereignty to build infrastructure and deploy necessary defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea". According to Barry Buzan (1991), the security of human collectiveness is affected by five primary sectors: Military, Political, Economic, Societal and Environmental. Control over the South China Sea would address, in a great deal, the Military and Economic factors of security for China in addition to energy and food security needs.

- i. **Military Security.** In his various writings, Alfred Thayer Mahan professed the strategic essence possessed by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean towards ensuring military security to the United States of America. A similar annotation may be drawn for China regarding the South China Sea. Analysed closely, the Spratly Islands score highly on strategic value as per the Mahanian scale. These islands are centrally located, provide excellent offensive and defensive strength and offer seamless communication lines with the Chinese mainland. They further provide China with a forward posturing capability to act as credible deterrence against an adversary. Therefore, effective military projection in this region would enable China to exploit force's fungibility against other disputants successfully. Lurking behind the scenes, unstated but explicit, lies the military muscle that gives meaning to the posturing of the diplomats (Art, 1999). Having solid military control over this region would offer China security against a direct threat on her mainland and enforce her regional hegemony by propositioning military spillover effects and linkage politics.
- ii. **Economic Security.** China is the second-largest economy in the world. Manufacturing has been a critical driver of her economic development. Towards establishing dominion in the world market, the South China Sea trade routes play a pivotal role. In 2016, 39% of China's trade passed through this region, comprising imports worth \$ 598 billion and exports worth \$ 874 billion (China Power, 2019). The South China Sea further forms the backbone of China's next mega economic infrastructure project – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As proposed by China, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road aims to link Chinese manufacturers to markets in Europe and Africa. China is developing various infrastructure projects all along this route to safeguard its economic interests. These projects would be critical enablers of Chinese economic growth in the future by providing much-needed facilities in developing nations for seamless and efficient marketing of goods. However, the grand scale on which these projects are being executed is already under the scanner as a part of 'debt-trap diplomacy' and need no further elaboration. The critical aspect of this project lies in the source where the Maritime Silk Road becomes debilitated – at its converging/ diverging points into the South China Sea. Thus, enforcing control over this region becomes a central focal point for ensuring China's economic security.
- iii. **Energy Security.** Another critical aspect of the South China Sea is the phenomenal potential of hydrocarbons present in its sea bed. The World Bank assesses it; this area houses proved reserves of at least 7 billion barrels of oil and 2.5 trillion cubic meters of natural gas (Xu, 2014). The potential figures, as pegged by the United States, project the quantity of oil and natural gas at 16 to 33 billion barrels and 7 to 14 trillion cubic meters respectively; Chinese evaluations value at 293 to 334 billion barrels and 30 to 72 trillion cubic meters (Xu, 2014). Assuming Chinese projections to be correct, it could be inferred that the South China Sea may possess anywhere between 43%-50% of proven oil reserves of the Persian Gulf. Therefore, establishing sovereignty in the region would safeguard China's hydrocarbon energy needs for the foreseeable future.
- iv. **Food Security.** China is the most populous nation in the world. To ensure her population is well fed is unquestionably a national security concern. China's White Paper on Food Security (2019) aims to ensure the basic self-sufficiency of grain and absolute security of staple food. As per this White Paper, from 1996 to 2018, the per capita direct consumption of staple grains has decreased, and non-grain foods such as meat and fish, ligneous foods, vegetables, and

fruits have increased. During that period, the per capita consumption of aquatic products increased by 72.5% to 46.4 KG.

- v. In comparison, the global per capita seafood consumption in 2018 was 22.3 KG (Cattaneo, 2018). To ensure sufficient supply to meet this growing demand, a substantial amount of Chinese fishing occurs in distant waters. According to a Green Peace report, 2,460 Chinese fishing vessels were operating per day (on an average) in distant waters in 2014, with fishing boats being spotted as far as Antarctica (China Power Team, 2020). To make matters intriguing, the waters around the Spratly Islands are one of the richest fishing grounds in the world, yielding about 7.5 tonnes of fish per square kilometre (Shicun, 2016). This coupled with the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture stating that there is 'practically no fish' in the East China Sea (China Power Team, 2020), makes the South China Sea a vital pillar in ensuring food security. Professor Shen Dingli of Fudan University, during his address at Puspahanas in October 2019, impressed upon the critical role of the South China Sea in guaranteeing the food security of his country. According to Gregory Polling (2019), the South China Sea accounted for 12% of global fish catch in the world in 2015, and more than 50% of the world's fishing vessels operate in this region, with most of them belonging to China.

Hybrid Warfare – Means to the Desired End

According to General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Federation, the 'rules of war' have changed in the 21st century, the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness (Galeotti, 2017). China uses less overt and more covert tactics to assert its political ends. Imposing sovereignty over the South China Sea, as claimed based on the Nine-Dash Line, is unquestionably a major political and strategic goal for China. The application of hybrid means creates an imbroglio, as these acts cannot be termed outright hostile due to their non-association with the traditional understanding of warfare. Qiao Liang aptly stated a few examples of this confusion and Wang Xiangsui (1999) – "Does a single 'hacker' attack count as a hostile act or not? Can using financial instruments to destroy a country's economy be seen as a battle? Does the broadcast of the brutal corpse of a USA soldier in streets of Mogadishu shake the determination of Americans to act as the world's policeman?". This complex nature was also well described by General Gerasimov in 2013 by his observations on the Arab Spring – "Of course, it would be easiest of all to say that the events of the "Arab Spring" are not war and so there are no lessons for us, military men, to learn. Nevertheless, maybe the opposite is true - that precisely these events are typical of warfare in the 21st century" (Galeotti, 2017). China has used numerous instruments of her national power in various domains and with changing intensities to tighten her grip on the South China Sea. Towards this end, China has undertaken numerous actions, analyses of which indicate a clear hybrid strategy.

- i. **Diplomatic Manoeuvre.** To seek a solution for the dispute in the South China Sea, arbitration of a 'Code of Conduct' (COC), since the 1990s, is being deliberated between ASEAN member states and China. Negotiations have not yet led to a declaration or a shared understanding of such a COC; however, ASEAN and China did come up with a Declaration of Conduct (DOC) in 2002 in lieu. Guidelines for employment of this DOC were endorsed in 2011. China has exploited the non-binding nature of DOC towards championing forward-moving ties to resolve this dispute; however, in practice, the DOC is merely a diplomatic ploy. China has blatantly disregarded the terms of this DOC by repeated harassment of various vessels and the development of artificial islands in the region. To guarantee that all stakeholders conform with a COC, it must have a legally binding nature. However, Foreign Ministers of Malaysia and the Philippines have confirmed that the framework does not call for the eventual COC to meet that mark (Poling, 2017). The COC, devoid of a legal binding nature, would favour China's nefarious designs, which are concerted on treating it as a conflict management forum rather than a dispute settlement forum (Shicun, 2016). COC is a means for China to achieve its goal of keeping the USA and its allies from intervening in this matter in the name of freedom of navigation or maintaining regional stability, whereas the ASEAN countries are looking for a status quo on present dynamics, knowing they cannot fight the Chinese or count on America (Lee Kuan Yew, 2017). China's efforts towards COC are nothing but insincere endeavours for peacemaking and a deliberate ploy to delay/ confuse the parties involved. It would not be surprising that even after the COC eventually comes into existence, its unbinding nature and China's outlook would further her encroachment of the disputed region while trying to maintain righteousness in diplomatic eyes.

- ii. **Economic Intimidation.** Analysis of the Chinese approach concerning the parallel engagement of nations concerning disputes and trade unearths a severe problem. All the South China Sea disputants are severely dependent on Chinese imports. With the advent of **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** strategy, seeking to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade, and stimulate economic growth, this economic dependency would only grow deeper. The exploitation of this economic influence to realise strategic aims in the South China Sea and beyond could easily be employed by China. Owning major infrastructure projects to facilitate its national interests in South East Asian Nations may also be resorted to (Sanchita Basu Das, 2017). The ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) of 2016 showcases an instance of this economic leverage. A strong-worded condemnation of Chinese harassment actions against freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, with particular references to the Permanent Court of Arbitration's judgement on Scarborough shoal and claims on the nine-dash line, was anticipated a result of this meeting. However, Cambodian objections barred any such retort (Today Online, 2016). China granted Cambodia USD 600 million aid days prior to the scheduled AMM (Jakarta Post, 2016) and followed it by waiving off USD 90 million in loans in October 2016 (Hindustan Times, 2016). This economic intimidation probably persuaded Cambodia to prohibit the inclusion of anti-China reprisals in the ASEAN joint communique. Furthermore, countries such as Pakistan, Montenegro, Kenya and Gambia, being obligated by Chinese economic and infrastructure projects, strongly supported China's disregard of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (Wen & Xiaochen, 2016).
- iii. **Military Force.** China is adopting a dual approach in the military domain of this dispute. Both approaches complement each other. These methodologies comprise reclamation of islands, reefs and shoals followed by their conversion to Military stations (capable of hosting offensive missile batteries, fighter and bomber aircraft) and subjugation of other nations' economic activities by coercive means. The scale and pace of Chinese reclamation activities are colossal. Within two years, from 2013 to 2015, China reclaimed 17 times more land than all other disputants combined over the past 40 years (Kapil Bhatia, 2018). With the entire region of the South China Sea under the Chinese missile and aircraft umbrella, spillover effects of military power into the diplomatic and political domains is noticeable. This was visible in Dr Mahathir Mohammad's remarks on Chinese infringements into the Malaysian EEZ – 'We watch what they are doing, we report what they are doing, but we do not chase them away or try to be aggressive... in the past, Malaysia used to send to China gold and silver flowers every year as a symbol of our being practical, well, subservient to them' (Bangkok Post, 2019). Translation of this military might into effectively blocking other nations' economic activities in the region, to fishing and oil and gas exploration, is being accomplished. The most important aspect of a blockade is the physical presence, warning of dire consequences against noncompliance. Harassment of fishing and oil exploration vessels (including ramming and sinking them) is a standard operating procedure of China's Coast Guard. All the other disputants have relatively more minor navies and therefore cannot maintain a presence like China, to protect their economic interests. This leads to severe psychological stress on the ordinary fisherfolk and other explorational vessel's crews and owners. According to Nguyen Quynh et al. (2019), Tran Van Nhan – a Vietnamese fisherman involved in such harassment, is afraid to go back to these disputed waters. His crew lost about USD 10,000 worth of catch, approximately four times the national average annual income. Fear for their lives and losing their hard-earned money would eventually refrain other fishers from venturing into those waters. It would be impossible for any nation to classify such harassment as an act of war; however, by numerous repetitions of these less than war actions, China's hold of the region is strengthening multi-fold.

Table 1: Military Capabilities of China's South China Sea Reefs (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2019)

Island/ Reef		Bombers	Fighters	Missiles (Anti-Ship)	Missiles (SAM)	Radar Station
S P R A T L Y	Subi Reef	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Fiery Cross Reef	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Mischief Reef	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Cuarteron Reef	X	X	X	X	✓
	Johnson Reef	Chinese Stations without military infrastructure				
	Hughes Reef					
	Gaven Reef					
P A R A C E L	Woody Island	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Triton Island	X	X	X	X	✓
	Money Island	Chinese Stations without military infrastructure				
	Tree Island					
	Lincoln Island					
	Duncan Island					

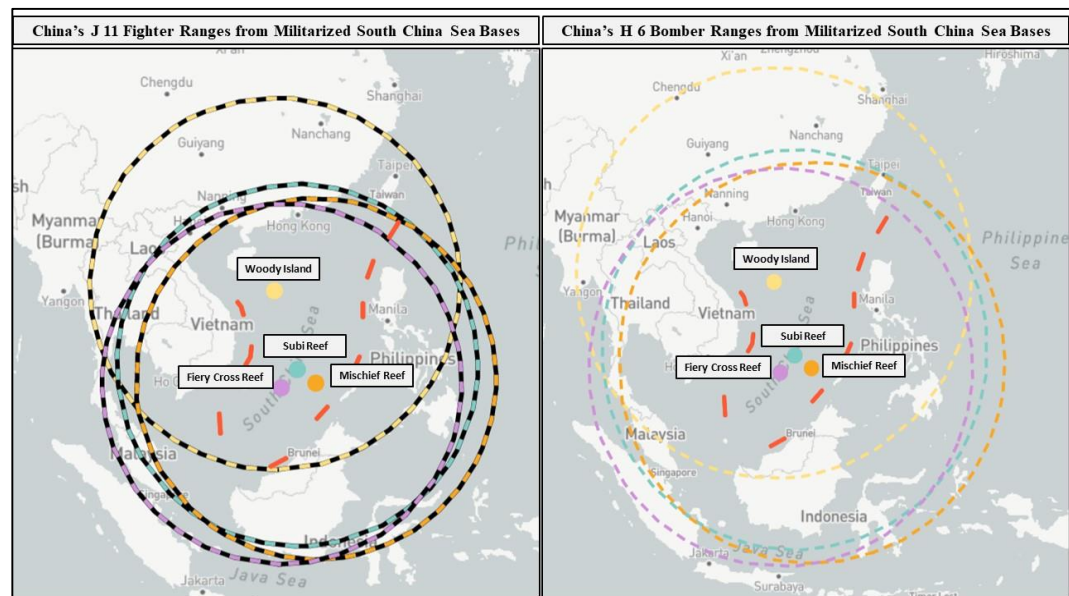


Fig. 3: China's Fighter and Bomber Aircraft Ranges from Militarized South China Sea Bases (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2019).

- iv. **Miscellaneous Subversions.** Towards furtherance of her grasp on the region, China recurrently brings up various subversions in Information, Media and Cyberspace domains. These act as irritants for the other disputants and vehemently remind them of China's prowess. A few of these incidents are listed below: -
- a. China started printing passports with a map incorporating the nine-dash line in 2012. These passports were not stamped with a visa by the Philippines immigration department from 2012 till 2019, instead of issuing a stapled visa as a sign of protest. However, with President Duterte cosying up to China, this practice has been overturned (Mourdoukoutas,

2019). This reversal may be one indication that the Philippines is giving in to China's redrawing of the South China Sea map. Vietnam does not stamp these passports for issuance of Visas (Straits Times/ Asia News Network, 2016) (the visas are issued separately).

- b. The controversy created by the movie 'Abominable' is another example of Information and Media subversion. The movie featured a scene where China's national map was depicted with the nine-dash line. Co-produced by China's Pearl Studios, the medium of an animated movie was employed to assert China's sovereignty over the South China Sea. As a mark of protest, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia banned the release and broadcast of this movie.
- c. In 2016, 68 websites belonging to the Philippines government experienced a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack within hours of the unfavourable ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration against Chinese nine-dash line claims. 'NanHaiShu' – a malware discovered during these attacks, was linked to China by F-secure's cybersecurity firm. Moreover, cyber-attacks struck two of the biggest and busiest airports in Vietnam in 2016 – Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, wherein offensive announcements were broadcast on the airport public address system against Vietnamese and the Philippine claims over the South China Sea. The hallmark of cyber-attacks is the element of plausible deniability associated with them. No hard evidence exists to prove substantially without any doubt that these attacks originated from China, thus making the employment of cyber warfare an ideal tool of Hybrid Tactics.
- d. On 20 April 2020, Beijing released a media statement naming 80 islands and other features in the South China Sea. This indicates China's reiteration of sovereignty claims over the region. Moreover, talks of establishing an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the region by China have been in the news since 2016. It would be intriguing to see if and when this materialises.

Conclusion

Technological and capitalist advancements, the dawn of the nuclear age and increased impetus on Human Rights have created a false notion that war is no longer possible and profitable. When people begin to lean toward and rejoice in the reduced use of military force to resolve conflicts, war will be reborn in another form and another arena, becoming an instrument of enormous power in the hands of all those who harbour intentions of controlling other countries or regions (Liang & Xiangsui, 1999). China's expansionist goals have been omnipresent since the Communist Party took control in 1949. Annexation of Tibet in 1950-51, war with India in 1962, an unsuccessful invasion of Vietnam in 1979, seizing Johnson Reef in 1988, Mischief Reef in 1995 and Scarborough Shoal in 2012, and border disputes with India in Ladakh offer hard evidence of China's expansionist mindset. Dominion over the South China Sea region plays a pivotal role in China's regional and global ambitions. The Chinese have linked supremacy over this region as a critical security enabler. Although Bhatia (2018) argues that as Alfred Thayer Mahan saw the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico as crucial to the United States in the early 20th century, similarly China views control of the South China Sea as a prerequisite to its broader maritime resurgence; the significance of this region for China is much beyond the scope of just military security. According to Stephen Van Evera (1998), war is more likely when conquest is easy. The absence of another powerful force in the region, thus, has played an essential role in Chinese adventurism to upset the established status-quo by Hybrid means. These means also provide an excellent cost-benefit advantage. China has successfully attained a strong foothold in this disputed region at surprisingly little cost. Opinion Warfare, Legal Warfare and Psychological Warfare – dubbed by the Chinese as 'Three Warfares' strategy, integrated with Chinese Military and Economic clout, concentrates on the fabrication of synchronised Hybrid means. These means are being exploited ingeniously to toy with distorted lines of war and peace in the South China Sea. The nature of these actions makes it difficult for a full-scale response from other disputants. The resulting imbroglio is ascribable to the fact that offensive actions in numerous domains are not distinctive hostile acts or acts of war. The absence of precedence to categorise these actions and their restricted threshold makes a complete military response unviable. Therefore, the onus now lies on all the other disputants of the region to develop and execute a suitable retort to China's Hybrid Warfare tactics.

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