

Vietnam and the Philippines' Strategic Responses to China's Maritime Assertiveness in South China Sea (2014-2025)

Amna **Khalid***

Bakri **Mat****

Universiti Utara Malaysia

Abstract

This article examines how Vietnam and the Philippines have managed China's maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea between 2014 and 2025. Using defensive realism and qualitative comparative analysis, this study examines how each state has combined diplomatic, deterrence, alliance, and legal strategies to safeguard sovereignty while avoiding escalation. The study finds that Vietnam emphasises calibrated diplomacy, military modernisation, and multilateralism, whereas the Philippines relies on alliance partnerships, legal advocacy, and asymmetric upgrades. Both confront structural constraints, including limited naval capabilities, economic dependence on China, ASEAN's consensus rule, and Vietnam's "Four Nos" defence policy. The article argues that realistic policy options lie in minilateral coast guard cooperation, information sharing, law-of-the-sea advocacy, and selective technological investments, which together strengthen resilience and advance a more stable maritime order.

Keywords: *South China Sea, Naval Strategy, Vietnam, Philippines, China's Maritime Expansion*

1. Introduction

The South China Sea, a crucial Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) for global trade and maritime security, has become a focal point of regional tension due to overlapping territorial claims by countries, including China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Taiwan (Teo, 2018). China's growing naval expansion, backed by its stance on maritime rights in the region, has posed significant challenges to the sovereignty and economic interests of these countries (Centre for Preventive Action, 2024; Nathan, 2023).

Among the most directly affected nations, Vietnam and the Philippines have adopted distinct strategies to counter China's naval advancements. Understanding these strategies is crucial to comprehending the dynamics of the South China Sea dispute and its broader implications for regional stability. China's increasingly expansive policy, including ramming Philippine vessels, using water cannons, deploying military-grade lasers, and puncturing rubber boats with knives, has escalated risks to levels not seen in the past decade (Ratcliffe, 2024).

Moreover, the South China Sea conflict has expanded from sea to air, increasing the risk of military confrontation between China and the Philippines. The Philippines has repeatedly dispatched military aircraft to the Spratly Islands and Macclesfield Bank, which China claims as its sovereign territory. China has warned that if the Philippines insists on carrying out "air invasions," it will take corresponding measures, and the consequences could be more serious than sea collisions (Lim, 2024). The situation has been marked by direct confrontations at sea. In July 2024, Vietnam protested the deployment of a Chinese navy hospital ship near the Paracel Islands, reaffirming its claim to the territory. This incident reflects Vietnam's firm stance on its sovereignty, despite its otherwise cooperative relationship with China (Walker, 2024a). Due to these aggravating tensions, Vietnam and the Philippines are strengthening their defence cooperation and deepening collaboration on maritime issues. The two countries signed "letters of intent" to enhance their maritime and disaster response engagements. They also agreed to resolve disagreements peacefully and within the framework of

international law. An official security agreement is expected to be signed by the end of 2024 (Walker, 2024b).

Vietnam and the Philippines have adopted divergent strategies in response to China's growing naval presence in the South China Sea. Their approaches, influenced by historical factors, national objectives, and geopolitical realities, have manifested in distinct military, diplomatic, and legal measures. This comparative analysis examines the strategies of Vietnam and the Philippines, assess their effectiveness in protecting national interests, and evaluate the implications of their contrasting approaches for regional stability. By employing a qualitative and comparative methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategic behaviours and limitations these nations encounter while navigating the complexities of the South China Sea dispute.

Therefore, this study delves on these main questions: 1. How and why did Vietnam and the Philippines combine diplomatic, deterrence, alliances, and legal strategies to manage China's maritime assertiveness between 2014 and 2024; and 2. which combinations most effectively produced restraint without uncontrolled escalation? The analysis is conducted through a structured and focused comparison that applies a common question set across four dimensions: diplomacy, deterrence, alliances, and legal strategy. A comparative framework enables side-by-side assessment and avoids narrative drift. The scope is confined to state policy instruments in the maritime and adjacent air domains. It does not extend to domestic legitimacy or broader economic welfare, except where these factors directly influence strategic choices.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology to conduct a comparative analysis of Vietnam's and the Philippines' strategies in countering China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea. Grounded in the theoretical framework of defensive realism, the research explored the motivations, actions, and challenges faced by these two Southeast Asian nations in responding to

China's assertive behaviour. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding the context-specific challenges of maritime strategies (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). The methodology was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the strategic behaviours and limitations these nations encounter while navigating complex maritime disputes.

The research relied primarily on secondary data collected from academic journals, policy papers, government reports, and various defence-related think tanks. Case study methodology, as outlined by Yin (2017), was instrumental in examining specific instances of military confrontations, diplomatic negotiations, and grey-zone tactics. By incorporating the latest data on military expenditures, diplomatic engagements, and regional cooperation efforts, the study ensured a comprehensive and current analysis.

A comparative approach was employed to examine the similarities and differences in Vietnam's and the Philippines' strategies. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of how context-specific variables shape state behaviour in contested regions (Ragin, 1989; Collier, 1991). The analysis focused on several key dimensions, including military modernisation, diplomatic strategies, economic pressures, and the challenges and limitations of their approaches. Military modernisation was assessed through an evaluation of defence enhancements, naval acquisitions, technological upgrades, and budgetary constraints. Diplomatic strategies were analysed by examining bilateral and multilateral engagements, legal advocacy, and alliance-building efforts. The study also assessed the impact of economic interdependence with China on each nation's strategic decision-making while identifying internal and external factors that hinder the effectiveness of their strategies.

The application of defensive realism provided a theoretical lens to contextualise the actions of Vietnam and the Philippines within an anarchic international system. As defensive realism posits, states operate under an anarchic international system where their security-driven actions often create unintended threats to others (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). Through the principles of security dilemmas, balancing, and buck-passing, the study examined how these states prioritise sovereignty and survival while seeking to avoid direct

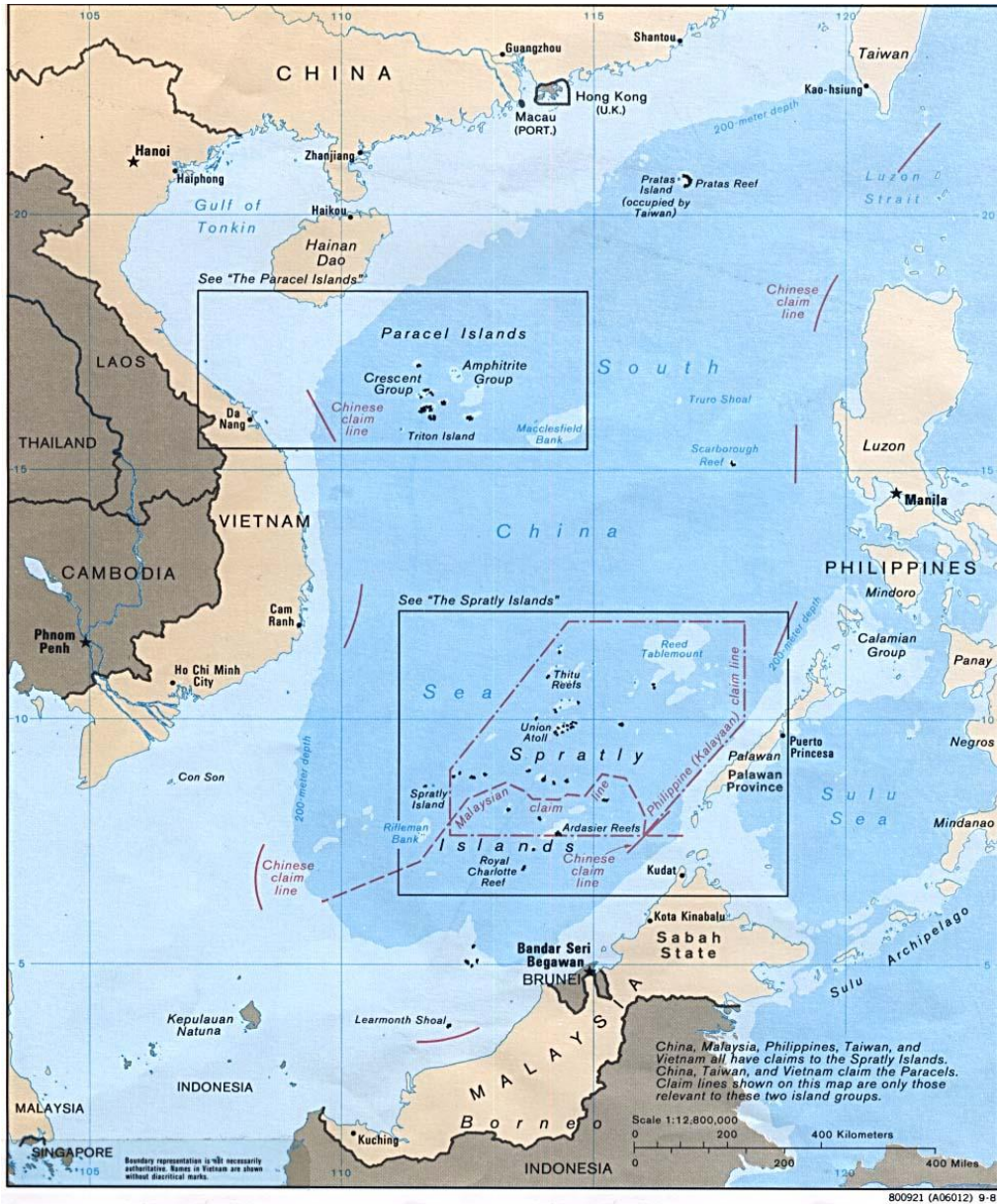
escalation with China. This framework facilitated a deeper understanding of how each country navigates the pressures of great-power competition in a highly contested maritime domain.

The analysis was conducted through content analysis and case study comparisons, synthesising and interpreting existing literature and reports to identify patterns in strategic behaviour. Content analysis, as emphasised by Krippendorff (2013), allowed for the systematic examination of data to uncover thematic trends and insights. Specific instances of military confrontations, diplomatic negotiations, and grey-zone tactics were examined to draw comparative insights. Policy implications were also explored, assessing the effectiveness of current strategies and identifying areas where improvements might be necessary to counter China's maritime ambitions more effectively.

A qualitative and comparative methodology is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex geopolitical interactions in the South China Sea. By focusing on Vietnam and the Philippines, the study provides a microcosm for examining the broader implications of China's maritime assertiveness in Southeast Asia. This approach also facilitated the exploration of context-specific challenges, such as resource constraints and internal governance issues, which are critical to the success of maritime strategies.

While the analysis is rigorous, the study acknowledges certain limitations. Reliance on secondary data may constrain the breadth of the findings, as the analysis is dependent on the availability and reliability of existing sources. This reliance on secondary data is a recognised limitation in qualitative research, as highlighted by Flick (2022) and Bryman (2016). Additionally, the findings specific to Vietnam and the Philippines may not fully capture the diversity of responses among other ASEAN nations. Despite these limitations, the study offered robust and meaningful insights into the evolving dynamics of the South China Sea dispute through careful triangulation of data and focused comparative analysis.

Figure 1: South China Sea Islands



Source: The Pery-Castañeda Library (PCL) Map Collection, University of Texas Library, 2021

3. Theoretical Framework: Defensive Realism and its Application to Vietnam and the Philippines

Defensive realism, a subset of structural realism, offers a valuable framework to analyse Vietnam's and the Philippines' strategic responses to China's maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea. Rooted in the principle that states operate in an anarchic international system, defensive realism posits that the primary goal of states is to ensure survival and security, rather than the unchecked accumulation of power (Waltz, 1979). This pursuit of security, however, often creates a security dilemma, wherein one state's efforts to bolster its safety inadvertently threaten others, triggering countermeasures and escalating tensions (Jervis, 1978; Herz, 1950).

In the South China Sea context, China's militarisation of artificial islands and expansive maritime claims epitomise the dynamics of the security dilemma. For Vietnam and the Philippines, these actions also challenge their sovereignty and jeopardise regional stability. Defensive realism underscores how both nations have responded by adopting balancing strategies, including military modernisation, alliance-building, and legal mechanisms to counterbalance China's growing influence while avoiding direct confrontation.

3.1 Core Concepts of Defensive Realism

The security dilemma is central to defensive realism, highlighting how states' defensive measures, such as military buildups, are often perceived as offensive by others, leading to a cycle of mistrust (Herz, 1950). Both Vietnam and the Philippines exemplify this dynamic as they enhance their military capabilities and deepen alliances to counter China's naval expansion. To mitigate threats, states employ balancing strategies, which include both internal measures, such as military modernisation and external approaches, such as forming alliances (Waltz, 1979). Vietnam and the Philippines employ a combination of these strategies, with Vietnam leaning on regional multilateralism and the Philippines prioritising alliances with major powers. Buck-passing is another notable principle, wherein

states shift the burden of countering threats to external actors to conserve resources (Mearsheimer, 2001). Both Vietnam and the Philippines exhibit this behaviour by leveraging alliances with the United States and other regional partners to enhance their deterrence capabilities.

Liberal institutionalism posits that regimes and interdependence decrease the likelihood of conflict by providing information, fostering reciprocity, and establishing enforcement mechanisms (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Martin, 1995). This perspective helps explain Vietnam's and the Philippines' repeated use of ASEAN and United Nations platforms, Manila's emphasis on "assertive transparency," and recurring advocacy for a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (Buszynski, 2012; Wei, 2025). Yet, the institutional payoffs have been limited due to a pronounced power asymmetry and a weak enforcement capacity. This is precisely the environment in which defensive realism anticipates that states will resort to complex balancing and denial to protect core interests (Waltz, 1979; Glaser, 1994).

Constructivism, by contrast, highlights the roles of norms, identity, and threat perception (Wendt, 1992; Katzenstein, 1996). Vietnam's strategic culture of self-reliance and non-alignment, codified in the "Four Nos" defence policy, predisposes it towards calibrated hedging (Sang, 2022). The Philippines, shaped by its legalist orientation and alliance identity, has normalised the use of lawfare and public diplomacy to signal resolve (Heydarian, 2019; Baviera & Arugay, 2021). These insights clarify why the two states diverge in their responses even under similar material constraints.

Defensive realism nonetheless provides the most appropriate core framework for analysis. The South China Sea is characterised by recurrent security dilemmas, persistent grey-zone coercion below the threshold of open conflict, and costly signalling around disputed reefs and shoals (Jervis, 1978; Sarjito, 2024). The central policy challenge is how smaller states can generate credible denial and restraint under an anarchic and asymmetric order. Defensive realism focuses on these mechanisms, including balancing, buck-passing, and anti-access/area denial strategies (Mearsheimer, 2001; Taliaferro, 2000), while remaining compatible with institutional and normative approaches. Liberal-institutionalist

and constructivist perspectives, therefore, serve as auxiliary lenses that explain institutional venues and identity-driven variance. However, defensive realism remains the most effective framework for analysing Vietnam's and the Philippines' strategic choices.

3.2 Application of Defensive Realism in the South China Sea

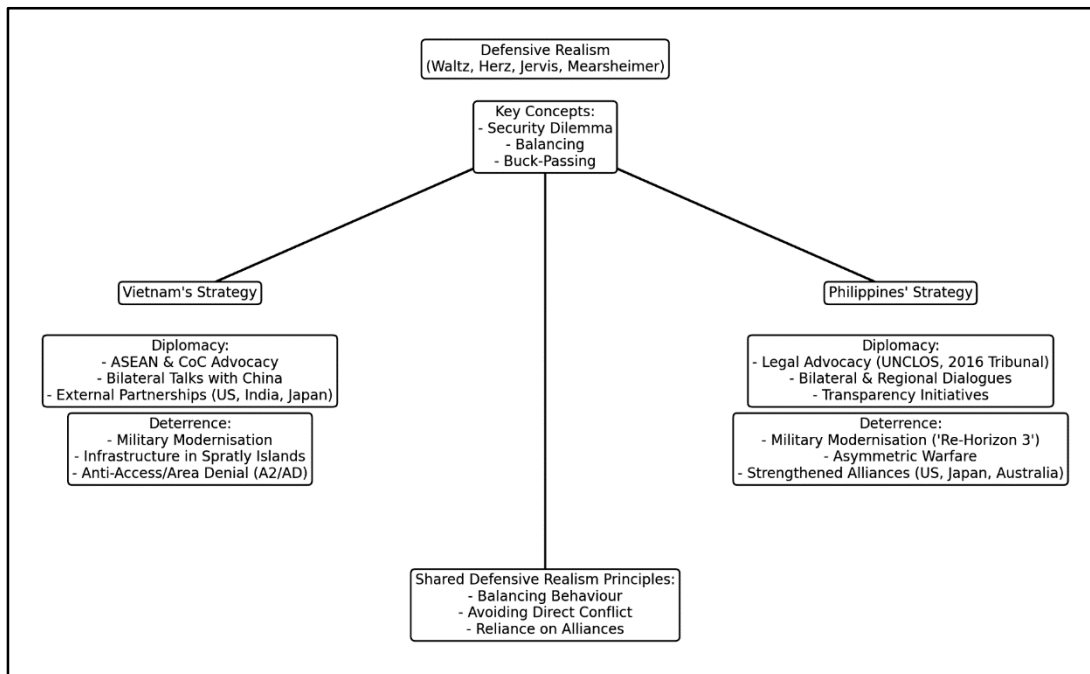
In applying defensive realism to the South China Sea dispute, Vietnam and the Philippines pursue distinct yet overlapping strategies to navigate the challenges posed by China's assertiveness. Vietnam adopts a strategy of diplomatic multilateralism through platforms like ASEAN while simultaneously modernising its military to deter aggression (Thayer, 2017). Conversely, the Philippines combines legal advocacy, such as invoking the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling, with alliances and military upgrades to bolster its position. Both nations also emphasise regional cooperation and international partnerships to counterbalance China's dominance (International Crisis Group, 2021). These strategies reflect the principles of defensive realism, which maintain stability through collective mechanisms while avoiding unnecessary escalation.

Defensive realism provides a robust theoretical framework to analyse the strategies of Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea. Through military modernisation with strategic alliances and regional diplomacy, both nations exemplify the principles of defensive realism. Their nuanced approaches, shaped by the imperatives of sovereignty and regional stability, underscore the adaptability of smaller states in managing great-power competition. Through their defensive realist strategies, Vietnam and the Philippines not only counter China's assertiveness but also contribute to a more stable and rules-based maritime order in Southeast Asia.

The application of defensive realism to the South China Sea dispute offers critical insights into China's strategic behaviour, particularly its maritime ambitions. As defensive realism posits, states operate under an anarchic international system where their security-driven actions often create unintended threats to others. China's military buildup, including the militarisation of artificial islands and the

assertion of its expansive territorial claims through the “nine-dash line,” exemplifies how efforts to enhance its security and influence have triggered regional security dilemmas. This theoretical lens helps contextualise China's actions as both a response to perceived threats and a strategy to dominate critical maritime routes, shaping the responses of affected states such as Vietnam and the Philippines.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: Defensive Realism



4. China's Maritime Ambitions in the South China Sea

narratives and legal frameworks spanning several centuries. At the heart of these claims lies the “nine-dash line,” first proposed by the Republic of China in 1947 and later endorsed by the People's Republic of China (PRC). This demarcation encompasses a vast area of the South China Sea, including the Spratly and

Paracel Islands—territories also claimed by several Southeast Asian nations, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei.

China contends that its sovereignty over these islands and waters has been upheld for over two millennia, citing ancient maritime activities, cartographic records, and administrative documents as evidence. However, these claims are strongly contested, as neighbouring states possess their own historical ties to the region and have engaged in fishing and navigation there long before the formalisation of modern territorial boundaries (Zhang, 2023; Wood, 2021).

In recent years, China has escalated its activities in the South China Sea through significant developments. Between 2014 and 2016, it rapidly constructed artificial islands in the region, equipping some with military infrastructure, including airstrips and radar systems. This strategy is widely seen as a means of consolidating territorial claims and expanding military influence (Sadler & Lapporte, 2024; Lee, 2023). Furthermore, China has conducted numerous military exercises in the South China Sea, often alongside Russia, underscoring its ambitions to project power and deepen its military partnerships. A key example is the 2024 joint naval exercises with the Russian Navy, which illustrated the strengthening of military ties between the two states (Mahadzir, 2024). Additionally, confrontations between China's coast guard and maritime militia with vessels from the Philippines and Vietnam, particularly in disputed areas such as the Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal, have raised concerns about a potential escalation of armed conflict in the region (Zhang, 2023).

China's ongoing naval expansion has exacerbated tensions with Southeast Asian nations, notably the Philippines and Vietnam. Both countries are increasingly concerned about the militarisation of artificial islands and assertive maritime activities that jeopardise their sovereignty and economic interests (Strangio, 2024b). In response, they have enhanced maritime cooperation, engaging in joint coast guard exercises and establishing direct communication channels to manage incidents and foster trust (Sang, 2024). These developments form part of a broader geopolitical contest, with major powers such as the United States asserting their presence in the region through military exercises and alliances aimed at counterbalancing China's growing influence (Yi, 2024).

Despite a shared commitment to resolving disputes through international law, the potential for conflict persists, as miscalculations in these volatile interactions could lead to broader confrontations. For both the Philippines and Vietnam, the strategic challenge lies in addressing immediate threats posed by China while managing their bilateral relations, particularly in the context of overlapping claims and mutual concerns over sovereignty (Nguyen, 2024).

5. Strategic Adaptations of Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea

The strategic responses of Vietnam and the Philippines to China's naval advancements in the South China Sea have evolved significantly over the years, shaped by their unique historical trajectories and geopolitical realities.

5.1 Vietnam's Strategic Adaptations

Vietnam's strategy has deep historical roots, shaped by centuries of territorial conflicts and the legacy of Chinese dominance. Vietnam's resistance against Chinese control of the Paracel and Spratly Islands dates to the 19th century, with its roots reinforced during the colonial period when France asserted control over the territories. Following independence, Vietnam's confrontation with China intensified during the 1974 Battle of the Paracel Islands, which marked a significant turning point (Shoji, 2016).

Diplomatically, Vietnam adopted a dual strategy of engaging China through bilateral talks while leveraging regional platforms, such as ASEAN, to push for multilateral solutions. The early 2000s saw Vietnam strengthening its ties with external powers, particularly the United States, as part of a hedging strategy against Chinese aggression (Nguyen, 2023). This cautious balancing act remains a cornerstone of Vietnam's modern approach.

5.2 The Philippines' Strategic Adaptations

The Philippines' strategy has been heavily influenced by its colonial history under Spanish, American, and Japanese rule. Post-independence, the Philippines maintained close ties with the United States, which played a pivotal role in shaping its maritime strategy. The landmark case of the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling, which invalidated China's expansive nine-dash line claims, marked a significant milestone in the Philippines' legal and diplomatic strategy (Dutton, 2020).

Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines adopted a more conciliatory stance towards China, emphasising economic cooperation over maritime disputes. However, this approach shifted significantly under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who prioritised military modernisation and strengthened alliances with the United States, Japan, and Australia to counterbalance China's growing influence (Rabena, 2024).

Table 1. Timeline of China's Naval Expansion and Strategic Responses by Vietnam and the Philippines (2014–2024)

Year	China's naval/ grey-zone moves	Vietnam's response	The Philippines' response
2014	Begins large-scale island-building in the Spratly Islands; HYSY-981 oil-rig standoff near the Paracels.	Deploys coastguard and fisheries vessels to confront the rig; sustained protests.	Continues UNCLOS arbitration case filed in 2013 (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016).
2015	Expands land reclamation; installs runways and military infrastructure.	Steps up modernisation (including the ongoing Kilo-class submarine programme, signed 2009; deliveries started 2014).	Engages ASEAN and other international bodies to diplomatically address China's actions (Castro, 2020).
2016	Permanent Court of Arbitration rules in favour of the Philippines, rejecting the nine-dash line.	Backs UNCLOS-consistent language; continues outpost upgrades; Kilo deliveries ongoing.	Despite a legal victory, President Duterte seeks economic rapprochement with China.

Table 1 (*cont'd.*). Timeline of China's Naval Expansion and Strategic Responses by Vietnam and the Philippines (2014–2024)

Year	China's naval/ grey-zone moves	Vietnam's response	The Philippines' response
2017	Live-fire exercises and PLA presence near the Spratly Islands.	Deepens ties with Japan and India, maintaining a steady asymmetric focus.	Major US-Philippines exercises were scaled down under Duterte (Balikatan continued a narrower scale) rather than expanded.
2018	Chinese coastguard and maritime militia harassment of regional fishers persists.	Expands defence links, including with Russia; maintains coastal denial (Bastion/Kh-35, ISR).	Builds coastguard capacity with Japanese support; escalates diplomatic protests.
2019	China swarms Thitu (Pagasa) Island, disrupting Philippine works (Heydarian, 2019).	Fortifies features it already occupies; increases engagement with the US (Reuters, 2020).	Manila has filed numerous diplomatic protests; there are no routine joint patrols with the US at this stage.
2020	Creates new administrative districts (Paracels, Spratly Islands).	Issues formal protests; urges a stronger ASEAN stance.	Rejects Chinese claims and begins to rebuild US ties in late 2020/21.
2021	Militia massing around Whitsun Reef; wider harassment continues (Chang & Beech, 2023).	Incremental coastal-defence and ISR upgrades.	US-Philippines exercises and patrol tempo begin to climb again.
2022	Large-scale PLA(N) and coastguard drills and patrols.	Joins drills with the US and Australia; quiet capability gains.	Marcos Jr. elected; Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) implementation accelerates.
2023	The Chinese coastguard and militia block resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal, using water cannons repeatedly.	Expands technological cooperation (e.g. with India) and ISR in the Spratlys.	Ramps up "assertive transparency;" upgrades EDCA (four new sites announced).
2024	Intensifies air and sea patrols around disputed features; repeated water-cannon confrontations.	Conducts naval and coastguard exercises; reinforces UNCLOS language at ASEAN and the UN.	Steps up joint patrols and exercises with the US; the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) was signed on July 8, 2024; further incidents are publicised.
2025	Maintains coercive patrols and presence; allied attention increases across the region.	Reaffirms the "Four Nos;" deepens but avoids formal alliances (Japan, India, US); prioritises ISR and asymmetric denial.	US-Philippines joint maritime drills intensify (mid-2025); Japan-Philippines RAA enters into force September 11 2025; EDCA build-out continues.

6. Diplomatic Strategies of Vietnam in the South China Sea

Vietnam's strategic responses to China's maritime ambitions in the South China Sea exemplify a nuanced approach that blends diplomacy and deterrence. By integrating multilateral engagement, international law, and bilateral diplomacy, Vietnam seeks to safeguard its sovereignty while navigating the challenges posed by an assertive regional power. These diplomatic strategies reflect not only Vietnam's immediate security concerns but also its broader objective of maintaining regional stability.

As a proactive member of ASEAN, Vietnam has consistently advocated for a legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) to manage disputes in the South China Sea. The CoC demonstrates Vietnam's commitment to regional solutions, as evidenced during its 2020 ASEAN chairmanship when it prioritised discussions on maritime security (Dutton, 2020; Nguyen, 2023). Vietnam's multilateral initiatives underscore its commitment to collective mechanisms for addressing unilateral actions and reducing tensions in the region (Thu, 2020).

Bilateral diplomacy with China forms another critical pillar of Vietnam's strategy. Despite ongoing disputes, Vietnam has engaged in high-level dialogues, such as the "3+3 strategic dialogue" initiated in 2024, which focuses on defence, diplomacy, and public security. While these discussions aim to stabilise relations, they fall short of resolving fundamental territorial disagreements (Mishra & Prajapati, 2024). The 2011 agreement on principles guiding the resolution of sea-related issues underscores a shared emphasis on cooperative conflict resolution, even though substantial progress remains elusive (Wu, 2024). These bilateral efforts allow Vietnam to manage tensions while avoiding outright confrontation.

Vietnam's diplomacy also extends beyond the regional sphere to the global stage. Invoking the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Vietnam consistently challenges China's expansive "nine-dash line" claims. Through international forums, Vietnam highlights its adherence to global legal norms, strengthening its international standing (RFA, 2024a). Additionally, Vietnam balances its relationships with major powers, such as the United States,

by adopting a hedging strategy. This approach avoids overt alignment while counterbalancing China's growing influence (Mishra & Prajapati, 2024).

6.1 Deterrence Measures Adopted by Vietnam

In parallel with its diplomatic endeavours, Vietnam has pursued a robust deterrence strategy focused on military modernisation and strategic infrastructure development. The acquisition of advanced weaponry, including six Kilo-class submarines and Su-30MK2 maritime strike aircraft from Russia, underscores Vietnam's commitment to enhancing its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities (Torode, 2014). These platforms enable Vietnam to project power within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), reinforcing its sovereignty and deterring potential aggressors (Grossman, 2024).

Vietnam's activities in the Spratly Islands further illustrate its deterrence strategy. Significant land reclamation efforts have expanded Vietnam's holdings by over 2,360 acres as of mid-2024, enabling the construction of harbours, airstrips, and radar systems. These facilities enhance Vietnam's ability to monitor activities in contested waters and bolster its defensive posture (Chen, 2024). The development of infrastructure capable of accommodating larger aircraft represents a calculated response to China's militarisation of the region (RFA, 2024b).

To strengthen its security framework, Vietnam has fortified alliances with key regional and global powers. Strategic partnerships with India, Japan, and Russia provide Vietnam with access to advanced technologies and military resources, reducing reliance on any single ally (Zeberlein, 2024). These alliances reflect Vietnam's recognition of the importance of collective resistance to China's maritime assertiveness, offering a diversified approach to maintaining its deterrence capabilities.

By integrating military modernisation with strategic partnerships, Vietnam demonstrates a readiness to defend its claims while managing the complexities of its regional position. Its dual approach of diplomacy and deterrence enables

Vietnam to navigate an increasingly contested maritime domain, striking a balance between sovereignty concerns and regional stability.

7. Diplomatic Strategies of the Philippines in the South China Sea

The Philippines' approach to diplomacy in the South China Sea has been shaped by evolving leadership priorities and the challenges posed by China's assertiveness. Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines sought to de-escalate tensions by emphasising economic engagement with China, sidelining the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling to secure investments and infrastructure projects under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (Heydarian, 2019). This policy marked a departure from prior confrontational stances and reflected an attempt to balance economic benefits with concerns about sovereignty. However, the Marcos Jr. administration has recalibrated this strategy, influencing the 2016 ruling to assert the Philippines' legal and territorial claims while simultaneously seeking broader international support.

Manila has employed multiple diplomatic tools to address Chinese assertiveness. The established Bilateral Consultation Mechanism with China serves as a platform to manage tensions and build confidence, though its effectiveness remains limited in addressing core disputes (Strangio, 2024a). In parallel, the Track 1.5 Manila Dialogue, which involved Filipino and Chinese participants alongside international scholars, underscores the Philippines' commitment to fostering dialogue while ensuring regional attention remains focused on the complexities of the South China Sea (Donnellon-May & Gill, 2024).

The Philippines has actively participated in regional forums, notably ASEAN, to advocate for adherence to international law and the adoption of a Code of Conduct (CoC). ASEAN provides a crucial platform for Manila to amplify its calls for collective security measures, particularly against unilateral actions in disputed waters (Rabena, 2024). Additionally, the Philippines has emphasised the importance of UNCLOS and the 2016 Arbitral Award, using these legal frameworks as diplomatic leverage to challenge China's expansive claims and rally international backing (CAN, 2025).

Manila's strategy has also included “assertive transparency”—a public diplomacy initiative aimed at highlighting China's actions in disputed waters. By publicising incidents, such as ramming and water cannon attacks, the Philippines aims to reinforce its legal rights and shape international opinion against China's tactics (Kit & Ng, 2025). Beyond ASEAN, the Philippines has deepened alliances with traditional and emerging partners, including the United States and Japan, to counterbalance China's growing influence. These relationships offer not only material support but also an avenue for strengthening the rules-based order in the region (Venzon & Calonzo, 2024).

7.1. Deterrence Measures Adopted by the Philippines

In response to escalating tensions in the South China Sea, the Philippines has pursued a robust deterrence strategy centred on military modernisation, asymmetric measures, and strengthened alliances. The “Re-Horizon 3” programme, with a \$35 billion investment, underpins Manila's military enhancements. This initiative prioritises the acquisition of advanced naval platforms, including frigates, corvettes, and coastal defence missile systems such as BrahMos, which bolsters the country's ability to patrol its waters and respond effectively to Chinese incursions (Lariosa, 2024). Additionally, the acquisition of Wonhae-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs), missile corvettes, fast attack interdiction boats, and S-70 Black Hawk helicopters further strengthens the Philippines' maritime patrol and response capabilities (APDR, 2025).

The construction of infrastructure on Thitu Island, including enhanced military installations, reflects Manila's commitment to asserting its presence in the Spratly Islands. These efforts signal the Philippines' intent to reinforce its territorial claims, even under the shadow of China's superior conventional forces (Lim, 2024). Similarly, joint military exercises with key allies, particularly the Balikatan drills with the United States, underscore the Philippines' resolve to strengthen operational readiness. Beyond bilateral engagements, trilateral security partnerships with Japan and the USA were initiated in January 2025, adding a

multilateral dimension to Manila's deterrence strategy, enhancing its ability to counterbalance China (Gutierrez, 2025).

The Philippines has adopted innovative measures to offset China's advantages, such as exploring asymmetric warfare strategies. These include the use of drones, fast attack boats, and anti-ship missiles to counter China's superior naval capabilities. Investments in the coast guard and paramilitary forces have also been prioritised to respond to China's grey-zone tactics, such as non-lethal confrontations and harassment in disputed waters (Wu, 2024). These measures enable Manila to project a credible deterrent despite resource constraints.

Further strengthening its alliance with the United States has been a cornerstone of the Philippines' deterrence strategy. Joint maritime patrols, support in resupplying Philippine detachments, and the deployment of US assets have helped to counter Chinese aggression in contested areas (Larus & Rice, 2024; Taffer, 2024). Manila has also sought to integrate itself into broader regional frameworks such as the Quad, aiming to leverage coordinated maritime security efforts with India, Australia, and Japan (Curtis, Wright and Schochet, 2025). Such collaborations reinforce the Philippines' position in the South China Sea while presenting a united front against Beijing's ambitions.

Through these diplomatic and deterrence strategies, the Philippines balances the challenges of addressing China's assertiveness while navigating its economic and security imperatives. By combining legal advocacy, regional diplomacy, military modernisation, and innovative defence measures, Manila has crafted a multi-pronged response to safeguard its sovereignty and contribute to regional stability. However, the sustainability of these strategies hinges on continued international support and effective coordination with its allies.

8. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Vietnam and the Philippines' Strategies in Countering China's Maritime Expansion

The ability of Vietnam and the Philippines to effectively counter China's maritime expansion is constrained by a range of interconnected factors, including internal maritime disputes, limited naval capabilities, China's grey-zone tactics, diplomatic

and economic pressures, and the challenge of balancing relations with Beijing. These challenges not only limit the effectiveness of their individual strategies but also complicate their efforts to form a cohesive partnership in addressing Chinese assertiveness

8.1 Maritime Disputes and Internal Tensions

Vietnam and the Philippines, despite sharing a common interest in countering China's dominance in the South China Sea, are hindered by internal tensions stemming from overlapping territorial claims. For instance, Vietnam's protest the Philippines' placement of navigational buoys in the Spratly Islands highlights the potential for discord between the two nations, even as they align strategically against a larger adversary (Tien & Danh, 2023). Historical disputes over specific maritime features in the Spratly and Paracel Islands, combined with differing interpretations of maritime boundaries under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), have further complicated bilateral relations. These disagreements not only weaken their ability to present a united front but also provide China with opportunities to exploit divisions through targeted diplomacy and economic incentives, undermining their collective deterrence efforts.

China's divide-and-rule strategy has capitalised on these internal disputes by fostering bilateral tensions among ASEAN members, effectively diluting the effectiveness of multilateral initiatives aimed at addressing its maritime ambitions. Moreover, these unresolved tensions have limited the scope of joint initiatives, such as coordinated coast guard operations or collaborative resource management, which could otherwise strengthen their collective stance against China's assertiveness (Daily Tribune, 2024).

To overcome these challenges, Vietnam and the Philippines must prioritise mechanisms for resolving disputes through bilateral agreements or ASEAN-mediated frameworks that manage overlapping claims without undermining their broader strategic alignment. Establishing shared resource management schemes or neutral conflict-resolution platforms could pave the way for increased cooperation. By addressing internal divisions, both nations can bolster their ability

to counterbalance China's actions and contribute to a more unified and effective ASEAN response.

8.2 China's Grey Zone Tactics and Limited Naval Capabilities of Vietnam and the Philippines

The stark disparity in naval capabilities between China and the two Southeast Asian states further limits their ability to counter Chinese aggression effectively. While Vietnam possesses more advanced naval assets, its cautious deployment of these capabilities constrains its ability to confront China decisively (Shoji, 2016). Vietnam has allocated USD 8.5 billion to its defence budget by 2027, with USD 1.8 billion earmarked explicitly for naval acquisitions between 2023 and 2027. These funds are intended to support the procurement of frigates, patrol vessels, and other essential equipment to bolster maritime capabilities (Global Data, 2022). However, as a developing nation, Vietnam faces persistent financial constraints that hinder its ability to modernise its fleet and develop advanced maritime surveillance systems. These shortfalls have resulted in gaps in Vietnam's maritime domain awareness, leaving parts of its extensive coastline vulnerable to threats such as illegal fishing, smuggling, and other illicit activities (Anh, 2024). Furthermore, overlapping responsibilities among maritime security agencies create coordination challenges, reducing the efficiency of responses to sovereignty infringements and other maritime threats (Dung & Son, 2023).

Similarly, the Philippines' defence modernisation efforts under the "Re-Horizon 3" programme also face budgetary constraints. While the programme prioritises upgrades such as frigates and corvettes, its reliance on external assistance and second-hand acquisitions from allies underscores the limitations imposed by inadequate financial resources (Lariosa, 2024). These fiscal barriers inhibit both nations' capacity to fully address the maritime security challenges posed by

China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. The Philippines has also struggled to modernise its maritime infrastructure, exacerbating its vulnerabilities in managing territorial waters and responding effectively to China's grey-zone tactics (Castro, 2022). Moreover, institutional fragmentation among maritime security agencies hampers the Philippines' ability to counter China's presence comprehensively, further complicating its strategic responses.

In addition to financial constraints, investment in marine science and technology remains underdeveloped in both Vietnam and the Philippines. Vietnam, for instance, faces limitations in marine resource surveys, a lack of capacity for producing essential marine equipment like ships and ports, and a shortage of Research and Development (R&D) personnel in marine economic fields (Huong et al., 2020). Similarly, the Philippines has underinvested in its maritime infrastructure, leaving gaps in its ability to secure its territorial waters against illicit activities and grey-zone tactics. These challenges highlight the structural and resource-based limitations that hinder both nations' ability to effectively counterbalance China's overwhelming power projection in the South China Sea.

8.3 Diplomatic and Economic Pressures

China's economic and diplomatic leverage significantly undermines the strategic cohesion between Vietnam and the Philippines, further complicating their efforts to counter its maritime ambitions. As the largest trading partner for both nations, China wields substantial influence that discourages aggressive posturing and exacerbates divisions within ASEAN. Vietnam's opposition to China's maritime assertiveness is tempered by its reliance on Chinese imports, which play a crucial role in its manufacturing supply chain (Tran, 2024). Similarly, the Philippines benefits from Chinese investments under initiatives like the Belt and Road but faces constraints in taking a confrontational

stance due to its economic ties (China Briefing, 2024). These dependencies not only dilute the collective deterrence capacity of Vietnam and the Philippines but also create divergent priorities that China can exploit to weaken any unified regional opposition.

9. Comparative Analysis of Vietnam and the Philippines: Strategies and Defence Capabilities

The comparative analysis of Vietnam and the Philippines reveals stark contrasts in their strategic responses to China's maritime assertiveness. While both nations share a common objective of safeguarding sovereignty and countering aggression in the South China Sea, their approaches diverge due to differences in military strength, resource allocation, and strategic alliances. Vietnam prioritises military modernisation, leveraging its larger defence budget to acquire advanced naval equipment. This focus underscores Vietnam's reliance on deterrence and hard power to assert its maritime claims. Conversely, the Philippines, constrained by a smaller defence budget, places greater emphasis on strengthening alliances with major powers, such as the United States, and adopting a more assertive diplomatic posture, particularly through the advocacy of international law and arbitration rulings. These differing strategies reflect not only the unique geopolitical realities faced by each nation but also the complementary potential of their combined efforts. Aligning their strengths—Vietnam's military modernisation and the Philippines' robust alliance networks—could serve as a strategic counterbalance to China's growing influence in the region. The following table provides a detailed comparison of their military and strategic capabilities, offering insights into their shared challenges and divergent approaches. The following table compares the strategic priorities of Vietnam and the Philippines, with a focus on military, diplomatic, and legal dimensions.

Table 2. Thematic Comparison of Vietnam and the Philippines' Responses to China's Maritime Assertiveness (2014–2025)

Dimension	Vietnam	Philippines	Implication
Military modernisation	Continued investment in coastal defence missiles, UAV surveillance, and submarine upgrades; expanding ISR in the Spratly Islands	Horizon 3 acquisitions proceeding (frigates, BrahMos missiles, UAVs); new OPVs arriving in 2025 under South Korea/Japan deals	Vietnam consolidates A2/AD; the Philippines accelerates modernisation with allied support
Diplomatic approach	Maintains ASEAN-first diplomacy; cautious dialogue with China; 2025 ASEAN meetings reaffirm "Four Nos"	Public diplomacy and "assertive transparency" continue; Marcos Jr deepens exposure of Chinese coercive tactics	Vietnam maintains manoeuvre space; the Philippines builds international legitimacy
Alliances and partnerships	Strengthened strategic ties with India and Japan in 2025; avoids formal alliance commitments	Treaty ally of the US; new trilateral maritime drills with US-Japan-Australia in 2025; closer coordination with Quad-plus	Vietnam maintains hedging; the Philippines leverages multilateral frameworks
Foreign military presence	Consistently rejects foreign basing in line with "Four Nos"	Expanded US access to EDCA sites confirmed in 2025; discussions of Japanese security cooperation broaden	Shows Vietnam's autonomy vs the Philippines' acceptance of extended deterrence
Legal strategy	Continues to rely on UNCLOS framing; avoids fresh litigation but raises concerns in UN forums	Sustains reliance on the 2016 ruling; "assertive transparency" escalates with new 2025 Coast Guard incident releases	The Philippines maximises lawfare; Vietnam retains flexibility
Grey-zone response	Expands maritime militia monitoring; avoids high-profile confrontations	Coast Guard protagonism heightened in 2025, documenting collisions and water-cannon incidents; joint patrols with the US and Japan	Divergent tactics but potential complementarity in information-sharing
Economic exposure to China	Still dependent on Chinese supply chains; seeking diversification through RCEP and Japanese/Korean investment	Belt and Road-linked projects reduced; still dependent on the Chinese market for select sectors	Economic ties constrain escalation options for both
Hard constraints	"Four Nos" reaffirmed in 2025 defence dialogue; prevents bloc politics or basing	Defence budget under pressure; domestic debate on dependence on US security guarantees	Cooperation is feasible only in areas that fit institutional and fiscal limits

Table 3 provides quantitative data on the defence capabilities of both nations, offering further insight into their resource allocation and operational potential.

Table 3. Comparative Defence Capabilities of Vietnam and the Philippines

Category	Vietnam	Philippines
Power Index Rank	23 of 145	41 of 145
Total Population	105,758,975	118,277,063
Available Manpower	54,994,667	50,859,137
Fit-for-Service	45,053,323	41,751,803
Reaching Military Age Annually	1,797,903	2,128,987
Active Personnel	600,000	150,000
Reserve Personnel	5,000,000	1,200,000
Paramilitary Forces	250,000	35,000
Defence Budget	\$8,594,000,000	\$4,380,000,000
External Debt	\$110,000,000,000	\$90,200,000,000
Foreign Reserve	\$97,955,500,000	\$103,742,000,000
Purchasing Power	\$1,354,000,000,000	\$1,138,000,000,000
Total Aircraft	246	202
Fighter Aircraft	41	0
Dedicated Attack	32	25
Transports	9	26
Trainers	60	23
Special-Mission	3	8
Aerial Tankers	0	0
Helicopters	101	122
Attack Helicopters	0	2
Tank Strength	1,374	10
Armoured Vehicles	11,912	11,878
Self-Propelled Artillery	40	12
Towed Artillery	535	294
Mobile Rocket Projectors	474	0
Fleet Strength	110	113
Submarines	9	0
Frigates	9	2
Corvettes	16	1
Patrol Vessels	35	58
Mine Warfare	8	0
Merchant Marine	1,973	2,203
Ports & Terminals	16	70
Square Land Area	331,210 km ²	300,000 km ²
Coastline	3,444 km	36,289 km

Source: Global Fire Power, 2025

The comparative analysis of Vietnam and the Philippines' defence capabilities highlights significant disparities in their military potential and resource allocation, reflecting differing strategic priorities and geopolitical challenges. Vietnam demonstrates greater military strength with a higher number of active personnel, extensive paramilitary forces, and multiple naval assets. These capabilities highlight Vietnam's focus on deterrence through military modernisation and its reliance on hard power to counter maritime threats. In contrast, the Philippines exhibits notable strengths in logistics, including a larger number of ports and terminals, as well as a more extensive coastline, which aligns with its emphasis on maritime patrol and economic security. However, its limited naval and air power—evidenced by the absence of submarines and fighter aircraft highlights a reliance on external alliances, particularly with the United States, to balance China's assertiveness. Financially, Vietnam allocates a larger budget to defence, enabling significant investments in modernising its arsenal, while the Philippines' comparatively smaller budget reflects its resource constraints and prioritisation of external partnerships. This disparity underscores the importance of bilateral cooperation and regional alignment within ASEAN in mitigating the asymmetries in their individual capabilities. The analysis reveals that while both nations are committed to safeguarding their sovereignty, their contrasting strengths and weaknesses necessitate complementary strategies to enhance collective resilience against external threats in the South China Sea.

10. Conclusion

The South China Sea remains one of the most contested maritime domains, where Vietnam and the Philippines have sought to balance diplomacy and deterrence against China's assertiveness. This study has shown that while Vietnam emphasises calibrated diplomacy, military modernisation and multilateral engagement, the Philippines pursues a more assertive strategy anchored in alliances, legal advocacy, and asymmetric modernisation. Both approaches are shaped by historical experience and geopolitical realities; however, structural factors limit their effectiveness. Limited naval capabilities, economic dependence on China,

ASEAN's consensus rule and Vietnam's "Four Nos" defence policy restrict the range of feasible options. These constraints highlight the need for pragmatic rather than ambitious solutions.

Realistic policy options, therefore, lie in strengthening minilateral cooperation and building resilience within existing limits. A shared maritime domain awareness network between Vietnam and the Philippines, linked with Japanese, American and Australian partners, would improve real-time monitoring and reduce vulnerability to grey-zone coercion. Joint coast guard operations in search and rescue and fisheries protection, supported by transparent communication protocols, would reinforce presence without escalating tensions. Coordinated lawfare and disciplined narratives, in which the Philippines sustains tribunal-based advocacy while Vietnam uses UNCLOS-consistent language, would maximise diplomatic leverage. Selective asymmetric denial investments, including coastal missile systems, UAVs and enhanced ISR, can offset naval gaps while avoiding reliance on foreign basing. Finally, direct hotlines, agreed rules of behaviour, and harmonised disengagement procedures would provide workable crisis-management tools, in contrast to the limited prospects of UN mediation or a formal ASEAN defence coalition.

By combining these measures, Vietnam and the Philippines can reinforce their sovereignty and strategic autonomy while advancing a stable and rules-based maritime order. Their complementary strengths, with Vietnam's calibrated multilateralism and the Philippines' alliance-oriented assertiveness, provide scope for convergence as long as recommendations remain grounded in political and institutional realities.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by Universiti Utara Malaysia through the University Research Grant (SO Code: 21190). We are grateful to our colleagues at Universiti Utara Malaysia for their valuable insights and expertise, which have greatly contributed to the development of this study, even if they may not share all the interpretations presented herein. We also extend our sincere appreciation to all those who generously shared their knowledge and perspectives throughout the course of this

research. Any errors or omissions remain solely our responsibility and should not reflect upon the contributions of these esteemed individuals.

Notes

* **Amna Khalid** is a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the Universiti Utara Malaysia. Specialising in major power competition and middle power agency in the global order, her research lies at the intersection of geopolitics, foreign policy analysis, and security and strategy. Email: <amnakhaliid2578@gmail.com> | ORCID: <[0009-0008-3673-0140](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3673-0140)>.

** **Bakri Mat, Ph.D.** (corresponding author) is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Affairs, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia and a Senior Research Fellow at the Asian Institute of International Affairs and Diplomacy. His scholarly expertise centres on international relations and strategic studies, with particular emphasis on non-traditional security challenges (including food security, migration, terrorism, and cybersecurity), national security, and ASEAN regional dynamics. He is actively engaged in academic, policy, and media discourse, contributing informed analysis that bridges theoretical scholarship with practical policy relevance in both national and international levels. Email: <bakri@uum.edu.my> | ORCID: <[0000-0003-4620-3877](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4620-3877)>.

References

- Anh, T. N. (2024, January 10). *Assessing Vietnam's maritime governance capacity: Priorities and challenges*. Accessed: 5th January 2025, from <<https://amti.csis.org/assessing-vietnams-maritime-governance-capacity-priorities-and-challenges/>>.
- APDR. (2025, March 5). *Re-horizon 3 initiative to spur Philippines defence expenditure*. Accessed: 10th January 2025, from <<https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/re-horizon-3-initiative-to-spur-philippines-defence-expenditure/>>.
- Baviera, A. S., & Arugay, A. A. (2021). The Philippines' shifting engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative: The politics of Duterte's legitimisation, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 277-300. <<https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2021.0001>>.
- Boruta, R. (2024, July 16). China review 2024-2. The geopolitical puzzle of the South China Sea. Does China's ambitions are facing regional resistance? *Eastern Europe Studies Centre*.

- <https://www.eesc.lt/en/publication/china-review-2024-2-the-geopolitical-puzzle-of-the-south-china-sea-does-chinas-ambitions-are-facing-regional-resistance/>.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buszynski, L. (2012). The South China Sea: Oil, maritime claims, and US-China strategic rivalry. *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 139-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.666495>.
- Castro, R. C. (2020). The Limits of Intergovernmentalism: The Philippines' changing strategy in the South China Sea dispute and its impact on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 335-358.
- Castro, R. C. (2022). The Philippines' responses to Chinese gray zone operations triggered by the 2021 passage of China's new coast guard law and the Whitsun Reef standoff. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 193-216.
- Centre for Prevention Action. (2024, July 29). Territorial disputes in the South China Sea. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.
- Chen, A. (2024, June 9). Vietnam expanding landfill work in South China Sea. *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3265972/vietnam-expanding-landfill-work-south-china-sea-report-says>.
- China Briefing Team. (2024, September 20). China-Philippines bilateral investment. *China Briefing*. <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-philippines-bilateral-trade-investment-and-future-prospects/#:~:text=Between%202000%20and%202022%2C%20China,demonstrating%20a%20strong%20economic%20partnership>.
- Collier, D. (1991). The comparative method: Two decades of change. In D.A. Rustow & K. P. Erickson (Eds.), *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives* (pp. 7-31). New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Curtis, L., Wright, E., & Schochet, N. (2025, January 9). The quad plus the Philippines: A strategic partnership for a peaceful South China Sea. *Center for a New American Security*. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/the-quad-plus-the-philippines>.
- Daily Tribune. (2024, August 30). China's divide and rule strategy. *VNExpress International*. <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-opposes-the-philippines-placing-navigational-buoys-at-spratly-islands-4606961.html>.

- Donnellon-May, G., & Gill, D. M. (2024, November 27). The Manila dialogue's role in shaping South China Sea diplomacy. *International Affairs*. <<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-manila-dialogues-role-in-shaping-south-china-sea-diplomacy/>>.
- Dung, P. X., & Son, T. M. (2023). *Tides of insecurity: Vietnam and the growing challenge from non-traditional maritime threats*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Dutton, P. A. (2020, July 27). Vietnam threatens China with litigation over the South China Sea. *Lawfare*. December 24, 2024. <<https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/vietnam-threatens-china-litigation-over-south-china-sea>>.
- Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). New York: Sage Publications.
- Glaser, C. L. (1994). Realists as optimists: Cooperation as self-help. *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 50-90. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2539079>>.
- Global Data. (2022, May 19). *Vietnam defense market*. Accessed: 5th January 2025, from <<https://www.globaldata.com/reports/vietnam-defense-market-2022-free-report/>>.
- Global Fire Power. (2025). *Comparison of Vietnam and Philippines military strengths (2025)*. Accessed 11th January 2025, from <<https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison-detail.php?form=form&country1=vietnam&country2=philippines&Submit=COMPARE>>.
- Grossman, D. (2024, July 15). *The Philippines' and Vietnam's South China Sea strategies have failed*. Accessed: 9th January 2025, from <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/07/philippines-and-vietnams-south-china-sea-strategies.html>>.
- Gutierrez, J. (2025, January 10). *Philippines-Japan defense cooperation to ensure long-term regional stability*. Accessed: 11th January 2025, from <<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/envoy-philippines-japan-defense-cooperation-to-ensure-long-term-regional-stability-01102025140157.html>>.
- Herrera, D. R. (2015). The Philippines: An overview of the colonial era. *Southeast Asia in the humanities and social science curricula*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 14-19. <<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/the-philippines-an-overview-of-the-colonial-era/>>.
- Herz, J. H. (1950). Idealist internationalism and the security dilemma. *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 157-180.
- Heydarian, R. J. (2019, June 6). *Duterte's dance with Beijing: Philippines' dual China policy*. Accessed: 5th January 2025, from <<https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/dutertes-dance-with-beijing-philippines-dual-china-policy>>.
- Huong, N. T., Dien, N. X., Linh, P. N., Loan, N. T., Phuong, N. L., & Hanh, N. M. (2020). Promoting sustainable development of Vietnam's marine economy in the process of

- international economic integration. *International Journal of Regional Development*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 40-57.
- International Crisis Group. (2021, December 2). *The Philippines' dilemma: How to manage tensions in the South China Sea*. Brussels: International Crisis Group, Crisis Group Asia Report N°316.
- Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the security dilemma. *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 167-214. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958>>.
- Katzenstein, P. J. (1996). *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in World politics*. Columbia University Press.
- Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the World political economy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Keohane, R. O., & Martin, L. L. (1995). The Promise of institutionalist theory. *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 39-51. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2539214>>.
- Kit, L. W., & Ng, D. (2025, January 10). *Philippines seeks diplomatic means in South China Sea disputes*. Accessed: 11th January 2025, from <<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippine-foreign-affairs-secretary-enrique-manalo-south-china-sea-donald-trump-4847936>>.
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (Third ed.). New York: Sage Publications.
- Lariosa, A.-M. (2024, February 28). Philippines starts latest naval modernization attempt amid South China Sea tensions. *U.S. Naval Institute*. <<https://news.usni.org/2024/02/28/philippines-starts-latest-naval-modernization-attempt-amid-south-china-sea-tensions>>.
- Larus, E. F., & Rice, J. (2024, October 15). *How the US and the Philippines should counter Beijing's aggression in the South China Sea*. Accessed: 10th January 2025, from <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-the-us-and-the-philippines-should-counter-beijings-aggression-in-the-south-china-sea/>>.
- Lee, H. (2023). The legality of militarization of the South China Sea and its legal implications. *KMI International Journal of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1-24.
- Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collections. The University of Texas at Austin Library. <<https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/asia.html>>.
- Lim, P. H. (2024, September 11). *China, Philippines to discuss South China Sea dispute amid clashes*. Accessed: 15th December 2024, from <<https://www.voanews.com/a/china-philippines-to-discuss-south-china-sea-dispute-amid-clashes-/7779823.html>>.
- Mahadzir, D. (2024, July 18). Chinese PLAN and Russian Navy finish South China Sea exercise. Retrieved December 15, 2024, *U.S. Naval Institute*.

<<https://news.usni.org/2024/07/18/chinese-plan-and-russian-navy-finish-south-china-sea-exercise>>.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: Norton.

Mishra, R., & Prajapati, H. (2024, December 31). *China-Vietnam dialogue won't change a thing in South China Sea*. Accessed: 11th January 2025, from <<https://asiatimes.com/2024/12/china-vietnam-dialogue-wont-change-a-thing-in-south-china-sea/>>.

Nathan, K.S. (2023). ASEAN and the major powers in the South China Sea: The role of law, diplomacy, and deterrence in moderating sovereignty claims. *Philippine Political Science Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 215-241. <<https://doi.org/10.1163/2165025x-bja10050>>.

Nguyen, L. (2024, June 27). *Vietnam confronts China with island building in South China Sea*. Accessed: 11th January 2025, from <<https://www.voanews.com/a/vietnam-confronts-china-with-island-building-in-south-china-sea/7675824.html>>.

Nguyen, N. L. (2023, May 3). Vietnam and China: Conflicting neighbors stuck in nationalism and memory. *Harvard International Review*. <<https://hir.harvard.edu/vietnam-and-china-conflicting-neighbors-stuck-in-nationalism-and-memory/>>.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). California: Sage Publications.

Rabena, A. J. (2024, July 16). The Philippines' four-pronged South China Sea strategy. *Australian Institute of International Affairs*. <<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-philippines-four-pronged-south-china-sea-strategy/>>.

Ragin, C. C. (1989). *The comparative method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative Strategies*. California: University of California Press.

Ratcliffe, R. (2024, July 21). Confrontations in South China Sea surge, raising fears a miscalculation could lead to conflict. *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/12/south-china-sea-conflict-philippines-coast-guard>>.

Reuters. (2020). *Vietnam protests at China's new administrative units in South China Sea*. Accessed: 27th December 2024, from <<https://www.reuters.com/article/vietnam-china-southchinasea/vietnam-protests-at-chinas-new-administrative-units-in-south-china-sea-idUSL4N2C7092/>>.

RFA. (2024, October 31). *Vietnam expands strategic capabilities in South China Sea*. Accessed: 10th January 2025, from <<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/vietnam-expands-strategic-capabilities-in-south-china-sea-10312024124256.html>>.

- RFA. (2024, July 17). *Vietnam files new claim on boundary in South China Sea*. Accessed: 9th January 2025, from <<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/southchinasea/vietnam-philippines-continental-shelf-07172024234834.html>>.
- RFA. (2024, June 12). Vietnam president stresses rule of law in South China Sea. *Radio Free Asia*. <<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/southchinasea/tolam-china-scs-06122024041945.html>>.
- Sadler, B., & Lapporte, E. (2024). China's evolving risk tolerance and gray-zone operations: From the East China Sea to the South Pacific. *The Heritage Foundation, Report No. 3850*. <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/BG3850_0.pdf>.
- Sang, H. T. (2022, April 26). Vietnam's "four no's" of defence policy are being tested. *Lowy Institute*. <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/vietnam-s-four-no-s-defence-policy-are-being-tested>>.
- Sang, H. T. (2024, September 9). The Philippines-China-Vietnam triangle and limits of the 'friends and enemies' maxim. *The Diplomat*. <<https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/the-philippines-china-vietnam-triangle-and-limits-of-the-friends-and-enemies-maxim>>.
- Sarjito, A. (2024). China's gray zone strategy in the South China Sea: Tactics, objectives, and regional implications. *Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 113-135. <<https://doi.org/10.59066/ijoms.v3i2.559>>.
- Shiga, Y., & Nitta, Y. (2023, August 19). Vietnam said to plan military buildup on South China Sea footholds. *Nikkei Asia*. <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Vietnam-said-to-plan-military-buildup-on-South-China-Sea-footholds>>.
- Shoji, T. (2016). Vietnam's omnidirectional military diplomacy: Focusing on the South China Sea. *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, Vol. 17, No. 41-61. <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2016/bulletin_e2016_4.pdf>.
- Strangio, S. (2024a, June 26). Philippines says it wants 'dialogue' with China following maritime clash. *The Diplomat*. <<https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/philippines-says-it-wants-dialogue-with-china-following-maritime-clash/>>.
- Strangio, S. (2024b, September 2). Vietnam, Philippines agree to bolster maritime security Cooperation. *The Diplomat*. <<https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/vietnam-philippines-agree-to-bolster-maritime-security-cooperation/>>.
- Taffer, A. (2024, July 26). *The puzzle of Chinese escalation vs restraint in the South China Sea*. Accessed: 5th January 2025, from <<https://warontherocks.com/2024/07/the-puzzle-of-chinese-escalation-vs-restraint-in-the-south-china-sea>>.

- Taliaferro, J. W. (2000). Security seeking under anarchy: Defensive realism revisited. *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 128-161. <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/447733>>.
- Teo, K. (2018). The South China Sea disputes: Makings of a new cold war? *RSIS Commentaries*. Singapore: Nanyang Technological. <<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/88168>>.
- Thayer, C. (2017, July 28). *Vietnam's strategies in the South China Sea*. Accessed: 11th January 2025, from <<https://eastasiaforum.org/2017/07/28/vietnams-strategies-in-the-south-china-sea/>>.
- Thu, H. L. (2018, December 6). Vietnam should update its South China Sea strategy. *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*. <<https://amti.csis.org/vietnam-should-update-south-china-sea-strategy/>>.
- Thu, H. L. (2020, September 30). *Rough waters ahead for Vietnam-China relations*. Accessed: 27th December 2024, from <<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/09/rough-waters-ahead-for-vietnam-china-relations?lang=en>>.
- Tien, N., & Danh, T. (2023, May 18). *Vietnam rejects Philippines' buoys at Spratly Islands*. Accessed: 5th January 2025, from <<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-opposes-the-philippines-placing-navigational-buoys-at-spratly-islands-4606961.html>>.
- Tonnesson, S. (2000). Vietnam's objective in the South China sea: National or regional security? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 199-220. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798484>>.
- Torode, G. (2014, September 8). *Vietnam building deterrent against China in disputed seas with submarines*. Accessed: 9th January 2025, from <<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/vietnam-building-deterrent-against-china-in-disputed-seas-with-submarines-idUSKBN0H20SF/>>.
- Tran, T. M. (2024, December 4). Vietnam and China manufacturing: Key comparisons for business strategies. *Vietnam Briefing*. <<https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnam-versus-china-manufacturing-cost-quality-infrastructure-comparison.html/>>.
- Venzon, C., & Calonzo, A. (2024, July 3). Chinese and Philippine officials seek to deescalate South China Sea tensions. *Time*. <<https://time.com/6994748/philippines-south-china-sea-tensions-diplomacy/>>.
- Vu, K. (2024, February 14). Why Vietnam cannot copy the Philippines' China policy. *The Diplomat*. <<https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/why-vietnam-cannot-copy-the-philippines-china-policy/>>.
- Walker, T. (2024, June 18). *China-Vietnam tensions flare up over South China Sea*. Accessed: 15th December 2024, from DW: <<https://www.dw.com/en/china-vietnam-tensions-flare-up-over-south-china-sea/a-69398016>>.

- Walker, T. (2024, September 10). *South China Sea: Philippines, Vietnam deepen defense ties*. Accessed: 15th December 2024, from <<https://www.dw.com/en/south-china-sea-philippines-vietnam-deepen-defense-ties/a-70181293>>.
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics* (1st ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Publications.
- Wei, C. N. (2025, May). Murky waters: The risks of the Philippines' South China Sea strategy. *International Affairs Forum*. <<https://www.ia-forum.org/Files//REZNFI.pdf>>.
- Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp. 391-425. <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>>.
- Wood, C. A. (2021, March 8). *Historically mine: The (Potentially) legal basis for China's sovereignty claims to land in the South China Sea*. Accessed: 12th December 2024, from Air University: <<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528218/historically-mine-the-potentially-legal-basis-for-chinas-sovereignty-claims-to/>>.
- Wu, S.-S. (2024, November 21). *The Philippines' security in the face of China's rising threats*. Accessed: 11th January 11, 2025, <<https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/News/Display/Article/3974669/the-philippines-security-in-the-face-of-chinas-rising-threats/>>.
- Yi, S. W. (2024, January 4). Navigating South China Sea security in 2024. *The Diplomat*. <<https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/navigating-south-china-sea-security-in-2024/>>.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Zeberlein, J. (2024). Vietnam and the four nos—How Chinese actions in the South China Sea influence Vietnam's hedging strategy. *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp.1-21. Retrieved from <<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol77/iss1/8>>.
- Zhang, A. (2023, October 24). Why does China claim almost the entire South China Sea? *Al Jazeera*. <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/why-does-china-claim-almost-the-entire-south-china-sea>>.