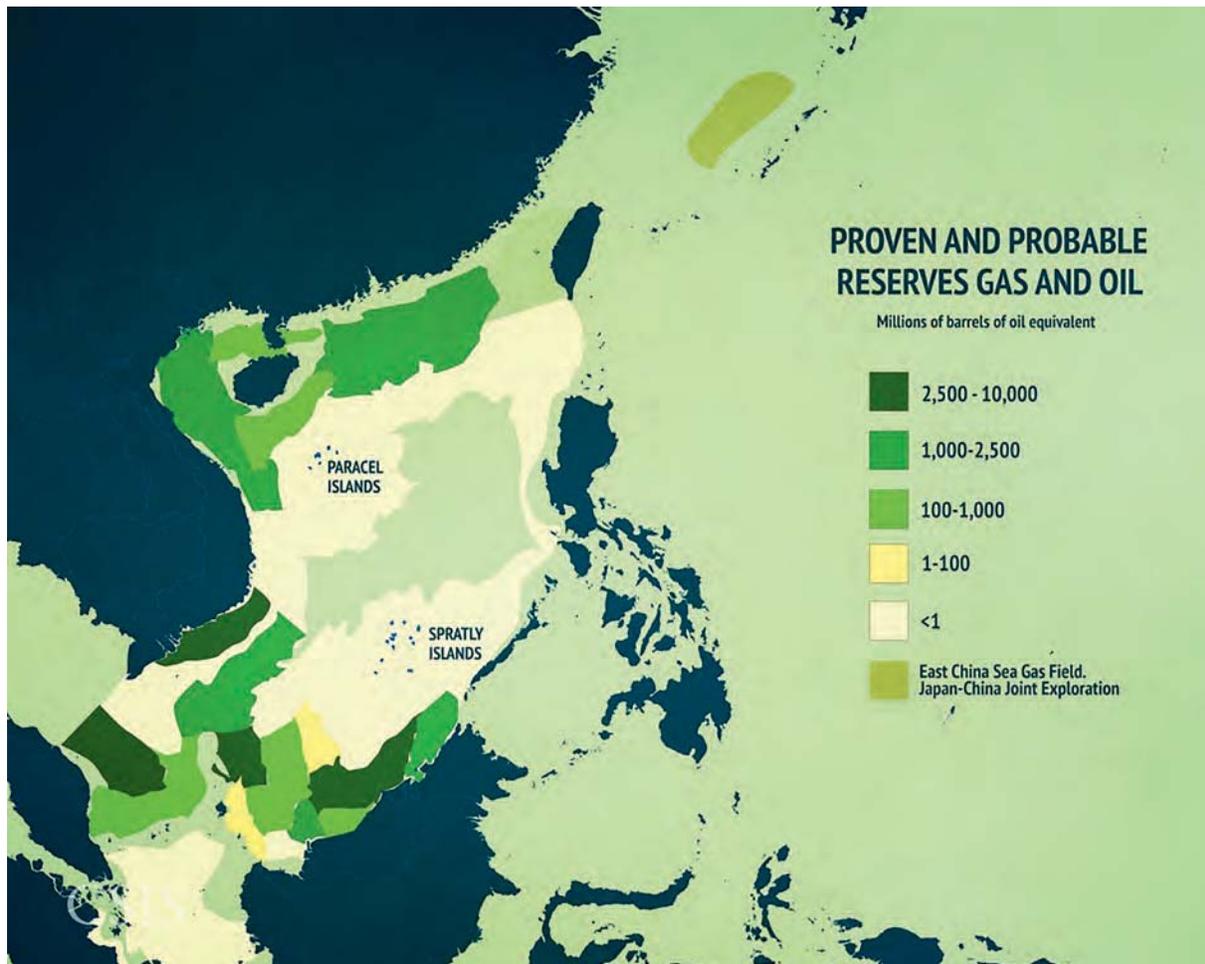


CASE 7: CHINA-VIETNAM OIL RIG STANDOFF (2014)

Figure 3.12. Hydrocarbon Deposits in the South China Sea



Overview

In May 2014, China moved an exploratory oil rig into disputed waters in the South China Sea. The drilling platform, known as HYSY 981, settled 17 miles from Chinese-held Triton Island in the Paracel Islands. This placed it well within an oil block that Vietnam already claimed, as well as on the Vietnamese side of a hypothetical median line between the two countries' continental shelves. Vietnam immediately deployed maritime law enforcement ships to disrupt the operation of the HYSY 981. In response, Beijing reinforced its handful of original escort ships with a large fleet of fishing boats, coast guard cutters, and eventually naval vessels. Hanoi maintained a presence in the area for the next two months despite China's substantial show of force and frequent collisions and ramblings. Vietnamese workers and other groups staged large-scale protests as the standoff escalated. The demonstrations quickly ballooned into violent, indiscriminate riots that targeted Chinese factories across Vietnam. Although the HYSY 981 had been scheduled to continue drilling through August, Chinese leaders decide to relocate it one month early in July. Beijing claimed the rig had simply completed its mission. Many observers, however, saw the Chinese withdrawal as a result of Vietnam's risk acceptance at sea.

BOX 3.7. Background on the Paracel Islands Dispute

The Paracel Islands (also known as the Xisha Islands or Hoang Sa Islands) are a group of about 130 small coral islands and reefs in the northwest portion of the South China Sea. They are roughly equidistant from the coastlines of China and Vietnam, with a maritime area of roughly 6,000 square miles and a total land area of about three square miles. The Paracels includes two main clusters: the Crescent Group centered on Pattle Island in the southwest and the Amphitrite Group centered on Woody Island in the northeast.¹ The archipelago is claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan but wholly occupied and controlled by China.

Although the region includes valuable fishing grounds, there are no proven or probable oil or natural gas reserves in the Paracels. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the whole South China Sea contains approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proven and probable reserves. Estimates by the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation are many times higher. However, geological evidence suggests dim prospects for oil and gas extraction in the Paracels. The vast majority of hydrocarbons in the South China Sea instead lie in shallow waters near the coast (Figure 3.12).²

China claims to have discovered and named the islands as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Beijing typically cites historical evidence of Chinese fishermen using the islands for fisheries production and navigation, as well as the Paracels' inclusion in administrative maps and other official documents in premodern times. Vietnam, on the other hand, argues that there is clear evidence of Vietnamese state authorities establishing effective jurisdiction over the Paracels between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. According to its foreign ministry, Vietnam made a formal act of annexation in 1816. As Vietnam's successor state following its 1858–1887 colonization of Indochina, France then asserted sovereignty over the Paracels for decades. Paris eventually stationed troops on Pattle and Woody Island on the eve of World War II, which saw Japan forcibly occupy both the Paracel and Spratly Islands.³

Tokyo's surrender in 1945 left French-Vietnamese troops in control of the Crescent Group and Republic of China forces in control of the Amphitrite Group. The People's Republic of China took over the Chinese garrison in 1950, and South Vietnam quickly came to control the Vietnamese side of the island group.⁴ For the next 25 years, as a war measure North Vietnam avoided challenging its Chinese ally's maritime claims. Shortly after the United States withdrew from Vietnam, China completed its occupation of the entire archipelago in the 1974 Battle of the Paracel Islands. The alliance between Beijing and Hanoi quickly dissolved following South Vietnam's defeat. The new Socialist Republic of Vietnam renewed Vietnamese claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in 1975.⁵ China initiated a brief, indecisive border war with Vietnam in early 1979 that led to tens of thousands of casualties on each side. Sporadic fighting continued in the 1980s, including a brief naval battle in the Spratlys in 1988.⁶

The end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union's dissolution, and China's international isolation following the Tiananmen Square massacre encouraged Vietnam and China to reestablish relations in 1991. The two countries signed a Land Border Treaty in 1999 and an Agreement on the Delimitation of the Tonkin Gulf in 2000.⁷ Since 1996, Vietnam has cooperated with foreign oil and gas corporations to

(continued)

BOX 3.7. (Continued)

conduct exploratory surveys and drilling in its claimed exclusive economic zone. In 1996 and 1998, China also drew straight territorial baselines around the entire Paracel archipelago, on the basis of which it also claimed an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf.⁸ After years of prolonged negotiations, in 2002 China, Vietnam, and the rest of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Beijing and Hanoi quickly agreed to a number of bilateral measures, including regular joint patrols, a joint fisheries survey, joint hydrocarbon exploration between PetroVietnam and the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation, and a commitment to start negotiations for maritime delimitation south of the Gulf of Tonkin.⁹

Beijing began exploring the hydrocarbon potential around the Paracels in 2003. In 2006, Vietnamese law enforcement vessels “took preventive measures” to confront Chinese seismic survey ships near Triton Island (also known as Zhongjian Island), the Paracels’ southernmost land feature.¹⁰ In 2007, Hanoi sent 30 naval auxiliary ships to disrupt a China National Petroleum Corporation seismic survey west of the Paracels. Vietnamese ships allegedly rammed the Chinese survey ship. China Marine Surveillance forces were forced to establish a protective cordon around their hydrographic vessel and ram the Vietnamese ships, which included both “shouldering” and head-on collisions.¹¹ In 2008, Vietnamese opposition forced a Swiss offshore drilling company to cancel a Paracels contract with China. In return, China pressured British Petroleum into canceling another project off the coast of southern Vietnam in 2009.¹²

In 2010, Chinese authorities detained some 25 Vietnamese fishermen near the Paracels. Vietnamese vessels likewise surrounded a Chinese Fisheries Law Enforcement Command ship patrolling disputed waters and also confronted a Chinese survey team 100 miles east of Vietnam’s Ly Son Island. In 2011, large anti-China protests erupted in Vietnam after reports that Chinese fishermen had deliberately cut the cables of a Vietnamese seismic ship. Vietnamese ships also challenged another Chinese research vessel operating 28 nautical miles west of Triton Island.¹³ Despite these tensions, near the end of 2011 the two countries signed an Agreement to Guide Settlement of Maritime Issues. They held two rounds of preliminary talks in 2012.¹⁴

In May 2012, China National Offshore Oil Corporation launched a massive deep-water drilling rig, the \$1 billion *Haiyang Shiyou* 981 (HYSY 981, also referred to as HD 981 by Vietnam). This marked the first exploration of its kind in the South China Sea, with Beijing drilling as deep as 10,000 feet without the aid of foreign companies. The corporate chairman stated that he viewed these rigs as “mobile national territory” and a “strategic weapon.”¹⁵ The next month, Hanoi passed legislation reiterating Vietnam’s claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Shortly after, the Chinese State Council established Sansha City on Woody Island as a prefectural-level city with administrative jurisdiction over the Spratly, Paracel, and the Zhongsha Islands (Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal).¹⁶ China National Offshore Oil Corporation also announced that it would open nine new oil and gas blocks along the western fringe of China’s Nine-Dash Line for joint operation with foreign companies. All nine overlapped existing Vietnamese blocks already leased to ExxonMobil and Gazprom.¹⁷ Beijing again conducted seismic surveys near the Paracels from May to June 2013. In December, ExxonMobil and the Vietnam Oil and Gas Group announced plans to build a \$20 billion power plant in central Vietnam using a major natural gas discovery in areas leased by

Hanoi. Other major foreign companies with a large stake in Vietnam's offshore production include Chevron, Perenco, ConocoPhillips, India's ONGC Videsh Limited, Russia's Gazprom, and Italy's Eni.¹⁸

1. "East and Southeast Asia: Paracel Islands," in Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, last updated September 13, 2016.
2. U.S. Energy Information Administration (hereafter U.S. EIA), "South China Sea," February 7, 2013.
3. Raul Pedrozo, *China versus Vietnam: An Analysis of the Competing Claims in the South China Sea* (Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation, 2014), 5–19, 40–48, 64, 108–109.
4. *Ibid.*, 49; M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 3 (2011): 292–319; Min Gyo Koo, "The Island and Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea," in *Island Disputes and Maritime Regime Building in East Asia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (New York: Springer, 2009), 137–140.
5. Tong Hum Kang, "Vietnam and the Spratly Islands Dispute since 1992" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2000), 18; Lo Chi-kin, *China's Policy toward Territorial Disputes: The Case of the South China Sea Islands* (London: Routledge, 1989), 86–98; Pedrozo, *China versus Vietnam*, 56.
6. David Gompert, Hans Binnendijk and Bonny Lin, "China's Punitive War against Vietnam, 1979," in *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 117–127; Terry McCarthy, "A Nervous China Invades Vietnam," *Time Magazine*, September 1999; Ramses Amer, "Vietnam and Its Neighbors: The Border Dispute Dimension," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 17, no. 3 (1995): 298–318; Chang Poa-Min, "A New Scramble for the South China Sea Islands," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 12, no. 1 (1990): 25–26.
7. Eric Hyer, "The South China Sea Disputes: Implications of China's Earlier Territorial Settlements," *Pacific Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1995): 34–54; Ramses Amer and Li Jianwei, "How to Manage China-Vietnam Territorial Disputes," *China-U.S. Focus*, April 18, 2013; Wu Shicun, *Solving Disputes for Regional Cooperation and Development in the South China: A Chinese Perspective* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2013), 117.
8. Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter Vietnamese MFA), "Contents of the International Press Conference on Developments in the East Sea" (press conference, Hanoi, June 16, 2014); Edward Wong, "Q&A: M. Taylor Fravel on China's Dispute with Vietnam," *New York Times*, May 8, 2014.
9. Ian Storey, "Conflict in the South China Sea: China's Relations with Vietnam and the Philippines," *Japan Focus*, April 30, 2008.
10. Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 16, 2014).
11. See Ryan D. Martinson, "Power to the Provinces: The Devolution of China's Maritime Rights Protection," *China Brief* 14, no. 17 (September 10, 2014); Scott Bentley, "Vietnam and China: A Dangerous Incident," *Diplomat*, February 12, 2014; "央视首次曝光中国海监船南海撞击越南船只画面" (CCTV Reveals Pictures for the First Time of a China Marine Surveillance Vessel Striking Vietnamese Ships in the South China Sea), *NetEase*, January 4, 2014.
12. Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 16, 2014); "FN Spokesperson Explains BP's Withdrawal," *Voice of Vietnam*, March 22, 2009.
13. Wong, "Q&A: M. Taylor Fravel"; Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 16, 2014); Nga Pham, "Vietnam's Anger over China Maritime Moves," *BBC News*, June 6, 2011.
14. "China-Vietnam Agreement to Guide Settlement of Maritime Issues," *Xinhua*, October 12, 2011; Amer and Li, "How to Manage China-Vietnam Territorial Disputes."
15. The rig is operated by a subsidiary company, China Oilfield Services Limited. "Haiyang Shiyou 981 Oil Rig Deployed to Seas off Myanmar," *Wanted China Times*, March 7, 2015; "China Begins Deep-Water Drilling in South China Sea," *Xinhua*, May 9, 2014; Zach Dubel, "Regional Implications for China's Newest Oil Rig," *Stimson Center*, July 2, 2012; "China Moves Illegal Oil Rig out of Vietnam's Waters after Oil Exploration," *Tuoi Tre News*, July 16, 2014.
16. "Law of the Sea of Vietnam," *Vietnam Law and Legal Forum*, July 8, 2012; Jane Perlez, "Vietnam Law on Contested Islands Draws China's Ire," *New York Times*, June 21, 2015.
17. Gregory B. Poling, *The South China Sea in Focus: Clarifying the Limits of Maritime Dispute* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013), 23–24; Ben Bland and Gwen Robinson, "China-Vietnam Row Hits Energy Groups," *Financial Times*, June 27, 2013.
18. "China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions of Chinese Company's Operations," *Xinhua*, May 9, 2014; "Exxon Mobil Signs Power Plant Deal with PetroVietnam," *VietnamNet Bridge*, December 17, 2013; "Vietnam Protests China Rig Placement in Disputed Waters," *Bloomberg News*, May 2, 2014; U.S. EIA, "South China Sea."

Timeline

	China	Vietnam	United States
Phase I: Chinese rig enters disputed waters			
May 1	Rig and service ships travel toward Paracels		
May 2	Settle 17 nm off Triton		
Phase II: Hanoi dispatches vessels, leading to massive standoff			
May 2	Sends 40 reinforcements	Sends 6 vessels to disrupt	
May 7	Sends more ships, aircraft	Sends up to 29 vessels and threatens legal action	
May 8	Expands perimeter	Increases ramming	Rules out any intervention
Phase III: Protests spread across Vietnam as Beijing escalates at sea			
May 10	Expands perimeter again	Small protests begin	
May 13	Begins drilling	Riots target Chinese factories	Urges restraint
May 15		Threatens arbitration	
May 18	Evacuates citizens, suspends air travel	Clamps down on riots	
May 19	Defense ministers meet but make no breakthrough		
Phase IV: Rig towed east to new drilling site			
May 27	Moves 23 nm northeast		
Jun 18	Some vessels depart, rig retracts equipment		
	Senior leaders meet in Vietnam to discuss standoff		
Phase V: Withdraws a month early			
Jul 15	Departs one month early	Claims victory for Hanoi	

Incident Details

Phase I: Chinese Rig Enters Disputed Waters

On May 1, 2014, Vietnamese maritime authorities detected the presence of *Haiyang Shiyou 981* (HYSY 981) and three Chinese oil and gas service ships off the coast of Da Nang Province. The four-ship group was northwest of Triton Island in the Paracel Islands and moving south. By the afternoon of May 2, it had settled 17 nautical miles south of Triton.¹ The rig now straddled two oil and gas blocks Hanoi had previously demarcated but not yet offered to foreign companies. Petro-Vietnam general director Do Van Hau later stated that it was unknown whether any commercially viable oil deposits lie under the seabed in these two blocks. The water depth is 3,000 feet.² China's Maritime Safety Administration announced the same day that the rig would conduct exploratory drilling until August 15. Foreign vessels were prohibited from coming within one nm.³

The legality of this drilling activity is a highly complex question. Under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, both Vietnam and China have the legal right to claim a 350-nm extended continental shelf measured from their territorial baselines. The HYSY 981 was placed 120 nm east of Vietnam's Ly Son Island and 180 nm south of China's Hainan Island, both of which indisputably generate a continental shelf. This cramped local geography means that the rig was therefore well within the maximum hypothetical entitlements of both countries. In 2006, China lawfully opted out of the treaty's provisions for compulsory arbitration in the case of maritime delimitation.⁴ As a result, China and Vietnam's dispute over rights to exploit seabed resources in the region cannot be resolved except through bilateral negotiations or voluntary international adjudication.

As indicated by the white line in Figure 3.13, the HYSY 981 was operating on the Vietnamese side of a median line drawn between mainland Vietnam and China—one possible option for eventual delimitation. Yet any agreement between the two countries would also have to take into account the status of the Paracels Islands. Under Article 121 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, islands that can "sustain human habitation or economic life of their own" are entitled to their own independent exclusive economic zones and continental shelves. It is possible (but not certain) that an arbitral tribunal would find that some of the Paracels' larger land features meet this test. As shown by the red area of the map in Figure 3.13, the location of the oil rig would fall on the Chinese side of a median line that gave the Paracels equal weight to mainland Vietnam for the purposes of maritime delimitation. It is

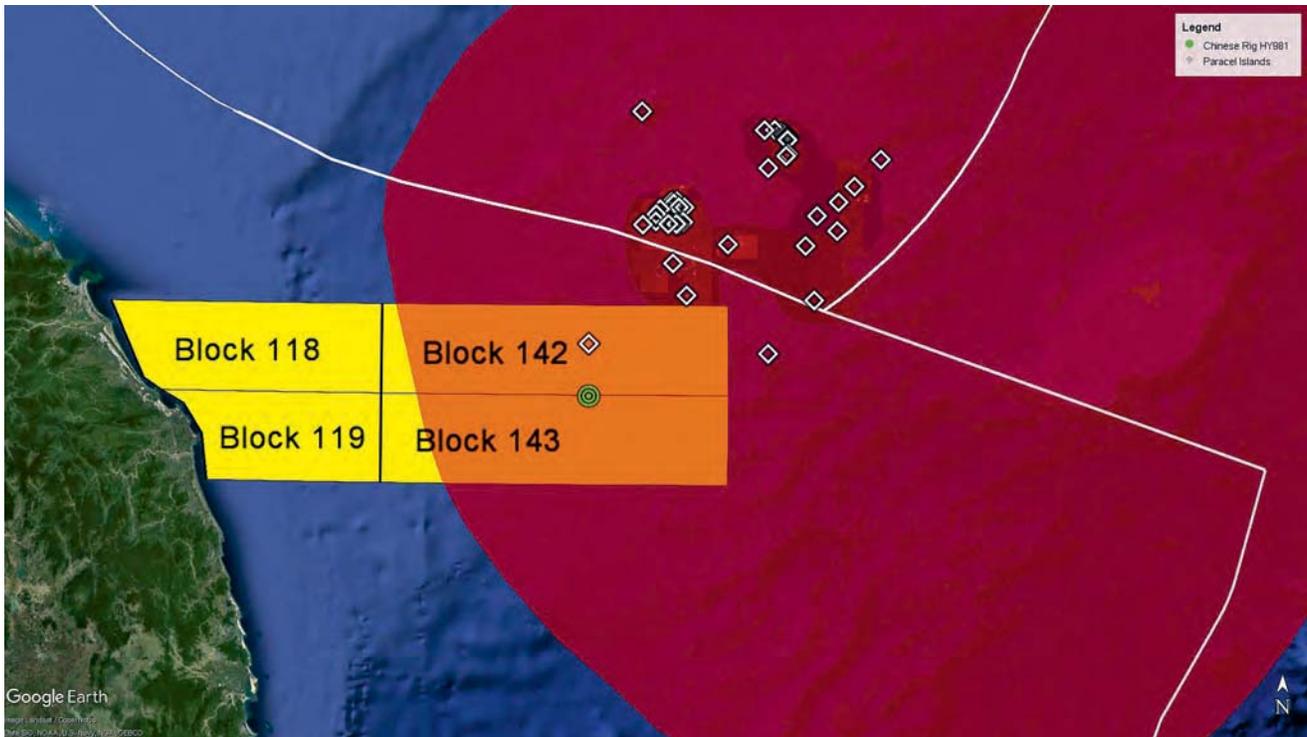
1. Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter Vietnamese MFA), "Vietnam's International Press Conference on 7th May 2014" (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi, May 7, 2014).

2. Ernest Z. Bower and Gregory B. Poling, "China-Vietnam Tensions High over Drilling Rig in Disputed Waters," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 7, 2014; "China Pushes Further into Vietnamese Waters," *Thanh Nien News*, May 6, 2014; "Vietnam Pledges All Efforts to Protect Territorial Waters," *Viet Nam News*, May 8, 2014; "Vietnam-China Oil Rig Flare Up Heightens Threat Perception in Region, Say Experts," *Platts*, May 8, 2014.

3. The announcement was made in Navigation Notice 14033, released on the Maritime Safety Administration's website. See <http://bbs.sjtu.edu.cn/bbswaptcon,board,Military,reid,1399475438,file,M.1399516847.A.html>.

4. "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea," December 10, 1982, art. 76; Bower and Poling, "China-Vietnam Tensions High"; Nong Hong, "Reconsidering the Role of Arbitration in the South China Sea," *China-U.S. Focus*, February 18, 2016.

Figure 3.13. Location of the HYSY 981



Source: Ernest Z. Bower and Gregory B. Poling, "China-Vietnam Tensions High over Drilling Rig in Disputed Waters," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 7, 2014.

highly unlikely Vietnam or an international court would award these tiny islands their maximum possible entitlements. Beijing and Hanoi's 2000 Gulf of Tonkin Maritime Boundary Agreement provides one possible precedent. This treaty gave Vietnam's Bach Long Vi and Con Co Islands 25 percent and 50 percent effect, respectively, in delimiting the two countries' continental shelves in the area.⁵ Applied to the Paracel Islands, such a formula might again put the HYSY 981 on the Chinese side of the line. Yet such an agreement would seem to be premised on Vietnam recognizing Chinese sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, which Vietnam itself claims and is unlikely to formally concede.

Phase II: Hanoi Dispatches Vessels, Leading to Massive Standoff

When China deployed HYSY 981 on May 1, it was initially accompanied by only three service ships. Upon detecting the oil rig, Vietnam Coast Guard and Fisheries Resources Surveillance forces were dispatched to demand the rig's withdrawal, perform "law enforcement duties," and assist Vietnamese fishermen in the area.⁶ By the next day, China logged a total of six Vietnamese vessels. According to Hanoi, the number of Chinese escorts also jumped to 40 ships, including China Coast

5. Isaac B. Kardon, "The Other Gulf of Tonkin Incident: China's Forgotten Maritime Compromise," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 21, 2015.

6. Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 16, 2014).

Guard, China Marine Surveillance, Fisheries Law Enforcement Command, transportation, fishing, and possibly PLA Navy ships.⁷ This fleet seems to have arrived after Hanoi deployed its own vessels to intercept the HYSY 981.

When Vietnamese vessels arrived, Chinese authorities quickly arranged their forces in protective rings to head them off.⁸ A Vietnamese navy official later stated that Hanoi's objective was to prevent the HYSY 981 from "establishing a fixed position." One Vietnamese diplomat told reporters that the prospect of the rig entering Vietnamese-claimed waters had "been one of our worst fears" since its maiden voyage in 2012, even if "the timing caught us by surprise."⁹

Violent collisions occurred almost immediately upon the arrival of the forces. Beijing claimed that the Vietnamese deliberately rammed Chinese ships, with video showing a Vietnamese Fisheries Resources Surveillance Force vessel ramming two China Coast Guard ships. Hanoi charged Beijing with similarly aggressive acts, including head-on collisions that in one case resulted in a Vietnamese vessel suffering a 10-by-3-foot rupture along its hull and the destruction of its right engine. Photographs showed Chinese coast guard vessels and tugboats firing high-powered water cannons at Vietnamese vessels. These activities continued on May 3, with the Vietnamese force increasing to as many as 36 vessels.¹⁰ To better shield the \$1 billion rig, China officially expanded the radius of its defensive perimeter from one to three nautical miles on May 4. Beijing also restated its commitment to end the operation by August 15.¹¹

Beijing and Hanoi protested each other's actions through diplomatic channels. China summoned Vietnam's ambassador to China on May 2 and May 4, and also called the Vietnamese vice foreign minister on a maritime hotline established in 2011. Vietnam summoned China's chargé d'affaires and presented a note verbale. Vietnam's Ministry of Defense also communicated with China's military attaché in Hanoi. Meanwhile, the chairman of PetroVietnam contacted his Chinese counterpart at the China National Offshore Oil Corporation via letter.¹²

In these communications, Hanoi argued that the drilling rig and its escorts were violating international law by operating in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. Hanoi also accused

7. "China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions of Chinese Company's Operations," Xinhua, May 9, 2014; Ngo Ngoc Thu, "The Situation on the Area with China's Illegal Drilling Rig HD981 within Vietnam's Waters" (press briefing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi, May 7, 2014).

8. Ngo Ngoc Thu, "The Situation on the Area."

9. Chris Brummit, "Vietnam Tries to Stop China Oil Rig Deployment," *USA Today*, May 7, 2014; Greg Torode and Charlie Zhu, "China's Oil Rig Move Leaves Vietnam, Others Looking Vulnerable," Reuters, May 8, 2014.

10. "China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions," Xinhua; "Video Shows 'Vietnamese Boat Ramming Chinese Ships' in Disputed Waters," *South China Morning Post*, June 14, 2014; Ngo Ngoc Thu, "The Situation on the Area"; "Trung Quốc huy động 80 tàu, máy bay quanh giàn khoan trái phép, đâm rách tàu cảnh sát biển VN," *VT News*, May 7, 2014.

11. This second announcement was made in Navigation Notice 14034, released on the Maritime Safety Administration's website. See <http://bbs.sjtu.edu.cn/bbswaptcon,board,Military,reid,1399475438,file,M.1399516847.A.html>.

12. "China Urges Vietnam to Stop Disturbing Chinese Companies' Activities in Xisha Islands," Xinhua, May 7, 2014; Vietnamese MFA, "Vietnam's International Press Conference on 7th May 2014."

Beijing of violating the spirit of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties, the 2011 China-Vietnam Agreement to Guide Settlement of Maritime Issues, and other high-level bilateral agreements. Hanoi demanded that Beijing respect its sovereignty, withdraw the rig, and settle their dispute through negotiation and other peaceful means. However, Vietnam still emphasized that it held “its friendship, cooperation and comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China in high esteem.” For its part, China maintained that the HYSY 981 was conducting “normal” oil and gas exploration in the “territorial waters” of Triton Island and the Paracels, which were “undisputed waters under the management of China.”¹³ Beijing asserted that Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone claims were thus irrelevant.

In a May 5 statement, a Vietnamese spokesperson protested China’s oil rig deployment as “illegal and invalid” and again demanded its departure. Beijing explained its position the next day that the drilling “is totally within waters off China’s Xisha Islands.”¹⁴ This public feuding mirrored high-level conversations taking place behind closed doors. On May 6, Vietnamese foreign minister and deputy prime minister Pham Binh Minh held a phone call with Chinese state councilor Yang Jiechi. Minh restated Vietnam’s position and cautioned State Councilor Yang about damage to “mutual political trust and cooperation.” He also stressed Vietnam’s resolve to “take all suitable and necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.” Yang, on the other hand, said Vietnam had no right to interfere with the operation of a Chinese company in Chinese waters. He reiterated Chinese sovereignty over the Paracels and warned that “China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposes Vietnam’s interference.”¹⁵

Later that day, Beijing claimed that Vietnamese ships were throwing overboard floating objects such as fishing nets and oil tanks to deliberately obstruct Chinese vessels. Video footage showed Chinese personnel removing wooden planks wrapped in metal wire from the water. Hanoi denied this charge and suggested that China’s violent ramming tactics and use of water cannons had created the debris.¹⁶

The United States waded into the dispute on May 6 as well. During a prescheduled trip to Vietnam, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Daniel Russel urged “each of the claimant countries to exercise care and restraint.” Russel also indirectly accused China of endangering the global economy and regional stability for “short-term economic advantage.”¹⁷ Back in Washington, a State Department spokesperson singled out Beijing’s actions “as provocative and unhelpful.” The State Department released a press statement the following day criticizing China’s “unilateral action” as

13. Vietnamese MFA, “Vietnam Demands China Withdraw from Territorial Waters,” press release, May 7, 2014.

14. Vu Trong Khanh, “CNOOC Oil Rig Fuels Vietnam-China Tensions,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2014; Hua Chunying, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on May 6, 2014” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 6, 2014).

15. “Press Digest—May 6,” *VGP News*, May 7, 2014; “Vietnam Says Prepared to Act on China Rig in Disputed Waters,” *Bloomberg News*, May 7, 2014; “China Urges Vietnam to Stop Disturbing,” Xinhua.

16. “China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions,” Xinhua; “Video Shows ‘Vietnamese Boat Ramming Chinese Ships’”; Vietnamese MFA, “Contents of the International Press Conference” (June 16, 2014).

17. Greg Torode, “U.S. Investigated Chinese Oil Rig Move amid Vietnam Complaints,” *Reuters*, May 6, 2014.

“part of a broader pattern of Chinese behavior to advance its claims over disputed territory in a manner that undermines peace and stability in the region.”¹⁸

On May 7, Vietnam reported that the number of Chinese escorts had risen to at least 60, including 33 coast guard vessels and 7 PLA Navy ships. Hanoi claimed that “dozens of aircraft” were operating overhead daily. A military officer also noted that all armed Chinese vessels had pulled the covers off their deck guns, demonstrating “that they are ready to be used at any moment.”¹⁹ China’s maritime presence around HYSY 981 meant that vessels had to be drawn from all over the country. Moreover, the China Coast Guard Command Center established in early 2014 reportedly played a central role in coordinating action, circumventing unit commanders by giving orders directly to individual vessels. For example, in late June it was reported that a Fisheries Law Enforcement Command vessel from Jiangsu Province returned to its home port after an 80-day deployment to safeguard the rig’s operations. Because the pecking order was still adjusting to the changes the integration of Chinese maritime law enforcement agencies brought about, the China Coast Guard’s control was probably not absolute and had to confront entrenched bureaucratic interests.²⁰ At this time, reports suggested that Vietnam had dispatched up to 29 armed naval and coast guard ships itself.²¹

Eight Vietnamese vessels had been rammed or hit with high-pressure water cannons and six personnel had been injured by May 7. Seeking to press China to end its oil exploration mission, Hanoi distributed video and photographic evidence of some incidents.²² Video captured rammings, water cannon firing, and encircling of Vietnamese ships. Officials maintained that these attacks had taken place dozens of times. Chinese vessels also had reportedly harassed three Vietnamese fishing boats as far as 70 nautical miles east of the oil rig.²³ Vietnamese officials threatened to “respond with similar self-defense” if the ramming continued. The commander of the Third Regional Command in Da Nang asserted that Vietnam’s forces would “not make any concession.” Damaged vessels were being repaired at sea so they could stay engaged. Nevertheless, officials said Vietnam would not fire first.²⁴

18. Jen Psaki, “Daily Press Briefing: May 6, 2014” (press conference, Department of State, Washington, DC, May 6, 2014); Jen Psaki, “Vietnam/China: Chinese Oil Rig Operations near the Paracel Islands” (press statement, Department of State, Washington, DC, May 7, 2014).

19. Officials gave different figures. Vietnamese MFA, “Vietnam’s International Press Conference on 7th May 2014”; Ngo Ngoc Thu, “The Situation on the Area”; “Chinese Ships Ram Vietnamese Vessels in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Thanh Nien News*, May 7, 2014.

20. See Martinson, “From Words to Actions,” 41–43.

21. Brummit, “Vietnam Tries to Stop China”; Damien Gayle, “Chinese Ships Ram Vietnamese Vessels and Fire Water Cannon,” *Daily Mail*, May 7, 2014.

22. “Chinese Ships Ram Vietnamese Vessels in Latest Oil Rig Row: Officials,” *Thanh Nien News*, May 7, 2014; “Chinese Vessels Deliberately Ram Vietnam’s Ships in Vietnamese Waters: Officials,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 7, 2014.

23. The Vietnamese foreign ministry maintains that a PLA Navy vessel was involved in this incident, but the reported pennant number 1241 does not seem to exist. Vietnamese MFA, “Contents of the International Press Conference” (June 5, 2014); “3 More Vietnamese Surveillance Officers Injured in Chinese Ships’ Attacks,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 10, 2014; “Trung Quốc huy động 80 tàu, máy bay quanh giàn khoan trái phép, đâm rạch tàu cảnh sát biển VN,” *VT News*; Chris Brummit, “Vietnam: Chinese Ships Ram Vessels near Oil Rig,” *Yahoo! News*, May 7, 2014.

24. Ngo Ngoc Thu, “The Situation on the Area”; Gerry Mulaney and David Barboza, “Vietnam Squares off with China in Disputed Seas,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2014; “6 Vietnamese Fisheries Surveillance Staff Injured in Confrontation with

Hanoi continued to update other regional states about the incidents, reporting that these countries were “concerned by China’s action.” It later came out that a Vietnamese diplomat circulated a note at the United Nations on May 7 to oppose China’s placement of the rig. Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, expressed “concern” and called “on all parties to exercise self-restraint.”²⁵ A Vietnamese foreign ministry official raised the possibility of international arbitration, saying, “We cannot exclude any measures, including international legal action, as long as it is peaceful.” Replying to these comments, a Chinese spokesperson stated that the Paracels had “nothing to do with Vietnam and even less to do with the United States.” Beijing criticized Vietnamese actions and condemned Washington’s “irresponsible remarks.”²⁶

On May 8, China’s vice foreign minister rejected Vietnam’s allegations. Beijing insisted that there had been no “clash,” just a “localized” and “controllable . . . difference of opinion.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserted that China had exercised the “utmost restraint” and only used water cannons in response to Vietnamese rammings, of which there had reportedly been 171 incidents. Chinese forces said they had found Vietnamese scuba divers as close as five meters from their vessels. Another official urged Hanoi to “come to its senses” and “cherish what the two have achieved in bilateral relations” in recent years. Meanwhile, the chief executive officer of China Oilfield Services Limited warned of “disastrous consequences” if the rig itself were rammed. Finally, Beijing claimed that Vietnam had sent several armed ships while China had only deployed civilian government vessels. Vietnamese officials rejected these arguments and reiterated that Hanoi would not yield to Chinese pressure.²⁷

Meanwhile, Hanoi continued to gain international support. On May 8, Vietnamese diplomats said they would try to garner sympathy at the upcoming 24th ASEAN Summit. However, Philippine diplomats commented that ASEAN members like Brunei, Cambodia, and Laos were opposed to commenting on the bilateral dispute.²⁸ The same day, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stated concern about the impact of “unilateral actions” in the

Chinese Ships,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 8, 2014; Nguyen Phuong Linh and Michael Martina, “South China Sea Tensions Rise as Vietnam Says China Rammed Ships,” *Reuters*, May 7, 2014.

25. “Chinese Ships Ram Vietnamese Vessels,” *Thanh Nien News*; “VN Circulates Note to Oppose China’s Illegal Placement of Drilling Rig,” *VGP News*, May 15, 2014; Republic of Singapore, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “MFA Spokesman’s Comments in Response to Media Queries on the South China Sea on 7 May 2014” (press conference, Singapore, May 7, 2014).

26. Linh and Martina, “South China Sea Tensions Rise”; Mulaney and Barboza, “Vietnam Squares off with China”; “China Urges against Vietnamese Interference in Territorial Water Exploration,” *Xinhua*, May 7, 2014.

27. A Western journalist traveling aboard a Vietnamese patrol ship later confirmed the presence of what his hosts identified as two PLA Navy missile corvettes. Austin Ramzy, “A View from the Sea, as China Flexes Muscle,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2014; “China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions,” *Xinhua*; Ben Blanchard and Nguyen Phuong Linh, “China Blames Vietnam for Sea Collisions, but Calls for Talks,” *Reuters*, May 8, 2014; “China Accuses Vietnam of Ramming Ships near Rig in Disputed Seas,” *Bloomberg News*, May 8, 2014; “Vietnam Not to Make Concessions to China’s Wrongful Acts,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 9, 2014.

28. Torode and Zhu, “China’s Oil Rig Move Leaves Vietnam”; Paul Mooney, “Southeast Asia Faces Renewed Unity Test as South China Sea Tensions Spike,” *Reuters*, May 9, 2014.

standoff. Several days later, a senior British official noted support for this statement.²⁹ Also siding with Vietnam, Japan's chief cabinet secretary told reporters that Tokyo was "strongly concerned about heightened tensions in the region due to China's illegal exploration." The Japanese foreign minister called the oil rig deployment "one step in a series of unilateral and provocative maritime advances by China." China responded by asserting that Japan's statements were "provocative," "irresponsible," and aimed "to tak[e] advantage" of the situation. An official from India's Ministry of External Affairs took a more neutral stance the next day.³⁰

The United States also weighed in more directly. Daniel Russel, still in Hanoi for meetings, engaged Vietnamese leaders in "extensive discussions" on the South China Sea. Russel implied that Washington would support Vietnam seeking international arbitration, hinting that "if diplomatic channels don't yield results, claimant countries enjoy the right to avail themselves of international legal mechanisms." Assistant Secretary Russel explicitly denied that direct U.S. involvement was on the table and stated that "there was no suggestion in any of my meetings from either side of a role for the U.S. military." The Navy would reportedly continue routine surveillance flights in the South China Sea, but did not deploy vessels near the standoff.³¹

On May 9, Chinese vessels purportedly seized fishing and communications equipment from a Vietnamese fishing boat operating in the Paracels. By that point, China had expanded the radius of its protected zone again to five nautical miles. Three more Vietnamese officers were also injured in ramming incidents by Chinese vessels.³² Although, Sino-Vietnamese bilateral communications were substantial by this point, with officials having met 6 times and communicated 14 times, markets reacted to the standoff with panic. Vietnam's leading stock index dropped by 5.9 percent in its biggest one-day decline in 13 years.³³

Vietnam won substantial diplomatic support on May 10. The ASEAN foreign ministers issued a standalone joint statement expressing their "serious concerns over the ongoing developments in the South China Sea." This statement followed a briefing by Vietnam and extensive discussion of

29. European Union, External Action Service, "Statement by the Spokesperson of the EU High Representative on the Recent Escalation of Tensions in the South China Sea" (press statement, Brussels, May 8, 2014); United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "UK Speaks in Support of EU Statement on Tensions in South China Sea," press release, May 10, 2014.

30. "U.S. Concern over South China Sea 'Dangerous Conduct,'" BBC News, May 8, 2014; "China Focus: China Urges Vietnam to Respect Its Sovereignty Rights over Xisha Islands," Xinhua, May 9, 2014; Fumio Kishida, "Press Conference by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida" (press conference, Prime Minister's Office, Tokyo, May 9, 2014); Indian Ministry of External Affairs, "Official Spokesperson's Response to a Media Query on the South China Sea" (press conference, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, May 9, 2014).

31. U.S. Embassy Hanoi, "Assistant Secretary Daniel Russel: East Asian and Pacific Affairs Press Roundtable," press release, May 8, 2014; Blanchard and Linh, "China Urges Talks."

32. Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 5, 2014); "China Sends Fighter Jets to Guard Illegal Oil Rig in Vietnam's Waters," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 11, 2014; "3 More Vietnamese Surveillance Officers Injured," *Tuoi Tre News*.

33. Blanchard and Linh, "China Urges Talks"; "China Requires Vietnam to Stop Any Form of Disruptions," Xinhua; "Vietnam Pledges All Efforts," *Viet Nam News*; Jane Perlez and Rick Gladstone, "China Flexes Its Muscles in Dispute with Vietnam," *New York Times*, May 8, 2014.

the incident.³⁴ Lobbying by Philippine president Benigno Aquino III was crucial to securing the final statement. Singapore's foreign minister also asserted that although ASEAN did not want to take sides, staying silent would damage the organization's power, unity, and reputation. Indonesia's foreign minister went so far as to say that Jakarta was "disappointed by the acts of the Chinese government." Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono also accused China of "gunboat diplomacy." Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak urged ASEAN to show resolve.³⁵ Myanmar and Cambodia took a softer line, indicating that they would "not be involved in bilateral issues" between Vietnam and China. Yet, Myanmar permitted a reiteration of the foreign ministers' statement the following day.³⁶

The Chinese foreign ministry reacted strongly to this show of unity. In a statement on May 10, Beijing said that "the issue of the South China Sea is not one between China and ASEAN" but a bilateral issue between individual claimants and China only.³⁷ The Vietnamese prime minister responded the next day by harshly condemning China's behavior. On May 12, a Chinese spokesperson said Vietnam's attempt to "rope in other parties and put pressure on China" would prove unsuccessful.³⁸

Phase III: Protests Spread across Vietnam as Beijing Escalates at Sea

While Vietnamese diplomats pressed for international support, Vietnamese citizens began taking to the streets. On May 10, about 100 demonstrators waved banners and chanted slogans for half an hour outside the Chinese consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. The protest was watched by a large force of state security officers.³⁹ Larger rallies were held on May 11. Hundreds demonstrated outside the Chinese embassy in Hanoi and a thousand in Ho Chi Minh City, with smaller numbers in Da Nang and Hue. Protests of such size are highly unusual in Vietnam since security services regularly disrupt anti-China demonstrations. Hundreds of police stood by in Hanoi to maintain control over the situation, but they did not intervene. Plainclothes officers even handed out signage declaring,

34. Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Current Developments in the South China Sea," May 10, 2014; "Vietnam Calls for ASEAN Unity against China 'Violations' in East Sea," *Thanh Nien News*, May 10, 2014; "ASEAN Meet: Leaders to Raise Concerns about China," *Hindu*, May 10, 2014.

35. "ASEAN Expresses 'Serious Concerns' over China Sea Dispute," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, May 11, 2014; "Indonesia 'Disappointed' with China over South China Sea Oil Rigs: Marty," *Jakarta Globe*, May 10, 2014; T.J. A. Burgonio, "PH, Vietnam Urge Strong ASEAN Action vs. China," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 12, 2014.

36. "Aquino Says ASEAN Must Tackle China Sea Claims, but Summit Host Myanmar Cautious," *InterAkysion*, May 10, 2014; Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "Chairman's Statement of the 24th ASEAN Summit: 'Moving Forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community,'" May 11, 2014; Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on Realization of the ASEAN Community by 2015," May 11, 2014.

37. Hua Chunying, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Remarks on the Statement on the South China Sea Issued by ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting" (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 10, 2014).

38. "China's Deployment of Oil Rig Endangers Peace, Marine Safety: Vietnam Premier," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 11, 2014; "China Says Vietnam Efforts to Rope in Others on Spat Will Fail," Reuters, May 12, 2014.

39. "Haiyang 981, Get out of Vietnam Now," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 10, 2014; "Vietnam Allows Anti-China Protest over Oil Rig," *Daily Mail*, May 10, 2014; "Looming Street Protests over China a Test for Vietnam," *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 2014.

"We entirely trust the party, the government and the people's army." Police loudspeakers criticized China's behavior and state television broadcast the event.⁴⁰

On May 12, demonstrations in Vietnam grew even larger. Some 10,000 people participated across the country, including 2,000 in Hanoi, 5,000 in Ho Chi Minh City, and 2,000 in Can Tho. Thousands of fishermen also rallied in the central Quang Nam Province.⁴¹ Beijing commented publicly on the protests for the first time, noting that China had asked Vietnam to "take all measures necessary to safeguard the security and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens and organizations in Vietnam."⁴² Markets continued to be volatile in the wake of escalating tensions, with the main index falling another 4.7 percent. Vietnamese travel agencies also began reporting that large numbers of Vietnamese tourists were canceling planned trips to China or switching to other destinations.⁴³

Meanwhile, China reportedly expanded its defensive perimeter a third time to some 10 to 15 nautical miles. The Vietnam Coast Guard accused China of sending military aircraft to intimidate Vietnamese ships.⁴⁴ Vietnam also released photographs of three PLA Navy ships near the oil rig, surrounded by coast guard vessels.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Vietnamese officers claimed that the navy ships tracked nearby ships with their deck guns. In what Vietnamese personnel said was a common mode of attack, at 10:30 am on May 11 the CCG 3401 and seven other coast guard vessels suddenly steamed toward a group of Vietnamese ships. As a Chinese aircraft buzzed overhead, three Chinese ship tried to ram them directly while the other five circled around and behind to cut off their retreat. In addition, a PLA Navy guided missile frigate reportedly left its position near the oil rig and deployed directly against Vietnam Coast Guard vessels. In the Paracels, two Vietnamese fishing boats had their equipment and catch seized.⁴⁶

40. "Vietnamese Take to the Streets to Protest China Oil Rig," Bloomberg News, May 11, 2014; Cat Batron, "Large Protests in Vietnam over China Oil Rig," *Rappler*, May 11, 2014; "Vietnamese Take to the Streets in Protest against China's Oil Rig Incursion," *Thanh Nien News*, May 11, 2014.

41. Manabu Ito, "Vietnam Sees Third Straight Day of Anti-China Protests," *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 12, 2014; "Nation Protests Chinese Intrusion," *Viet Nam News*, May 13, 2014; "Protesters Request China Withdraw Oil Rig from Vietnam's Waters," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 13, 2014.

42. Hua Chunying, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on May 12, 2014" (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 12, 2014).

43. "Vietnam Stocks Tumble to Four-Month Low as China Tensions Rise," Bloomberg News, May 12, 2014; "Vietnamese Tourists Cancel China Tours over Chinese Oil Rig Tension," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 13, 2014.

44. This included "fighter jets" and an aircraft bearing the pennant number 9401, which flew over the Vietnam Coast Guard ship CSB-8003 at a height of 3,000 feet. "China Sends Fighter Jets to Guard," *Tuoi Tre News*.

45. The vessels' pennant numbers are indiscernible in the images themselves, but the Vietnam Coast Guard labeled them the *Jinhua* (534) frigate and the *Dongan* (753) missile corvette—previously identified in a May 7 briefing—as well as the *Yuqing* (752) and another a *Houxin*-class missile corvette. "Chinese Ships Ramming Vietnamese Ships in Pictures," *VietnamNet Bridge*, May 11, 2014.

46. Vietnamese reports also identified the presence of a helicopter with the pennant number B-7112. "Chinese Vessels Continue to Attack Vietnamese Ships in Vietnam's Waters," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 12, 2014; "Marine Forces Pledge Continued Resistance," *Viet Nam News*, May 13, 2014; "China Uses Missile Frigate to Block Vietnamese Ships: Official," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 14, 2014; Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 5, 2014).

On May 13, Secretary Kerry spoke with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi over the phone. The U.S. secretary of state said Beijing's deployment of the oil rig and its escorts was "provocative" and requested that both sides deescalate. In response, Wang urged Kerry to work with China to develop a "new type of great power relations." A Chinese spokesperson also commented that regional states had been "emboldened" by the United States' "wrong words and actions." Meanwhile, there were reports that Beijing rejected an offer for a face-to-face meeting between the Vietnamese Communist Party's secretary-general and the Chinese president.⁴⁷

In Vietnam, anti-China unrest finally erupted into violence. Up to 20,000 workers from the Vietnam Singapore Industrial Park staged walkouts and riots followed soon after. Rioters vandalized hundreds of foreign-owned factories that they believed were owned by Chinese companies (because they had names with Chinese characters). In fact, Taiwanese, Singaporean, Malaysian, and South Korean firms were also targeted. At least 15 factories were burned, particularly labor-intensive textile and garment factories.⁴⁸ Vietnamese police were present and said they arrested roughly 440 rioters, but were unable or unwilling to prevent the riots. A number of Vietnamese hotels and bars also announced that they were instituting a patriotic ban on Chinese customers. Amidst this unrest, hundreds of Taiwanese citizens were forced to take shelter in a Taiwanese hotel in Binh Duong City.⁴⁹

China lodged "solemn representations" with Vietnam to protect Chinese citizens and institutions, stop the destruction, and punish those responsible. Beijing issued safety warnings to Chinese citizens in Vietnam, and Hong Kong released a travel warning. Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou said he was sending two Taiwanese officials to Vietnam and raised the possibility of sending military aircraft to conduct evacuations if necessary. Singapore also summoned the Vietnamese ambassador to urge Hanoi "to restore order urgently." To manage the growing crisis, Vietnam sent its deputy foreign minister to Beijing for comprehensive talks.⁵⁰ At sea that day, three China Coast Guard vessels formed a line and rammed Vietnamese vessels. At the time, 86 Chinese vessels were reportedly in the area, protecting the HYSY 981, which had lowered its drilling equipment.⁵¹

47. "U.S., China Spar Again on South China Seas Dispute," Reuters, May 13, 2014; Hua Chunying, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on May 13, 2014" (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 13, 2014); Keith Bradsher, "China and Vietnam at Impasse over Rig in South China Sea," *New York Times*, May 12, 2014.

48. Denise Tang, "Hong Kong Issues Vietnam Travel Warning after Mobs Torch Chinese Factories," *South China Morning Post*, May 14, 2015; Ho Binh Minh and Manuel Mogato, "Vietnam Mob Sets Fire to Foreign Factories in Anti-China Riots," Reuters, May 14, 2014; Julie Makinen, "Vietnam Mobs Torch Foreign Factories in Anti-China Protests," *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 2014; Chris Buckley, Chau Doan, and Thomas Fuller, "China Targeted by Vietnamese in Fiercy Riots," *New York Times*, May 14, 2014.

49. "Anti-China Protesters Damage Offices, Torch Factories in Vietnam," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, May 14, 2014; "Kerry Wades into South China Sea Row as Vietnamese Protests Grow," *Al Jazeera America*, May 13, 2014; Manabu Sasaki, "Vietnam Hotel Shuts out Chinese Customers over Maritime Dispute," *Asahi Shimbun*, May 13, 2014.

50. "Anti-China Protesters Damage Offices," Australian Broadcasting Corporation; Makinen, "Vietnam Mobs Torch Foreign Factories"; Tang, "Hong Kong Issues Vietnam Travel Warning"; "Live Report: Vietnam Holds Press Conference on China's Illicit Oil Rig," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 15, 2014.

51. "Chinese Vessel Rams, Destroys Railing of Vietnam Coast Guard Ship," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 13, 2014; Vu Trong Khanh, "Vietnam Says It Is Exercising 'Restraint' in Standoff with China," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2014.

On May 14, Vietnamese factories remained closed despite the mobilization of riot police. Taiwan reported that the riots had affected 200 Taiwanese firms. South Korea announced that 50 of its factories had been attacked. Even factories unaffected by the violence remained shut, and many unfurled pro-Vietnam signs. Vietnamese authorities reported that some Chinese citizens had begun fleeing across the border to Cambodia. That afternoon, “thugs” blocked traffic along a national highway and some cars were stopped because the passengers looked Chinese.⁵² Beijing then issued a travel warning for Chinese nationals planning trips to Vietnam. New riots broke out that night at a Taiwanese-owned factory in the central Ha Tinh Province, where hundreds were injured and up to 21 killed, including Chinese workers.⁵³

At sea, the PLA Navy deployed two of its three total *Yuzhao*-class amphibious transport docks to the rig while Chinese aircraft flew nearby. Each ship bristles with five guns and eight surface-to-air missiles and can carry a full marine battalion of 500 to 800 troops and 15 to 20 armored vehicles. In the Paracel Islands, a Chinese vessel rammed and damaged yet another Vietnamese fishing ship. Chinese vessels also cut across the bow of a Vietnamese ship carrying international reporters at close range.⁵⁴ The same day, Australia expressed support for the recent ASEAN statement on the South China Sea.⁵⁵

Several diplomatic exchanges occurred on May 15. Vietnamese foreign minister Pham Binh Minh held a phone call with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi. Minh emphasized that the riots were “spontaneous” and said they would be dealt with according to the law. Vietnamese prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung sent an official directive ordering ministries to protect foreign investors and punish lawbreakers. At the same time, Hanoi implied that it was still considering bringing the oil rig incident to the UN Security Council or seeking international arbitration.⁵⁶ Beijing expressed shock at the violence and placed the blame squarely on Hanoi. Chinese state media also accused Vietnam of encouraging the protests.⁵⁷

52. Jonathan Kaiman, “Vietnamese Workers Torch Foreign Factories over Chinese Sea Claims,” *Guardian*, May 14, 2014; Buckley, Doan, and Fuller, “China Targeted by Vietnamese in Fiery Riots”; Heng Reaksmey, “After Anti-China Protests in Vietnam, Chinese Flee to Cambodia,” *VOA News*, May 14, 2014; “Vietnam Police Detain over 600 Rioters in Southern Localities,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 14, 2014.

53. “China Issues Tourist Warning after Riots,” *Inquirer Global Nation*, May 15, 2014; “Up to 21 Dead, Doctor Says, as Anti-China Riots Spread in Vietnam,” Reuters, May 15, 2014.

54. “Two Chinese Transport Vessels Equipped with Anti-Air Missiles Detected,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 14, 2014; Vietnamese MFA, “Contents of the International Press Conference” (June 5, 2014); “Vietnamese Force Never Wavers Despite Chinese Attacks,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 15, 2014.

55. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), “Statement on Development in the South China Sea,” press release, May 14, 2014.

56. “VN Demands China’s Positive Response, Assures Foreign Nationals,” *VGP News*, May 15, 2014; “PM Orders Urgent Measures to Maintain Security, Order,” *VGP News*, May 15, 2014; “Live Report: Vietnam Holds Press Conference,” *Tuoi Tre News*.

57. Hua Chunying, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on May 15, 2014” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 15, 2014); “Vietnam Sends Mixed Signals to Mobs after Two Chinese Killed in Riots,” *Xinhua*, May 16, 2014.

By May 16, over 400 factories had been damaged and 1,100 others shut down. Hanoi reported that it had arrested more than 1,000 criminal suspects from the riots. Chinese media at this time confirmed that at least two Chinese citizens had been killed. Beijing reported that Vietnam had sent up to 60 coast guard and military vessels to the site of the oil rig, accusing Hanoi's ships of responsibility for over 500 ramblings over the previous two weeks. Vietnamese media reported that China had sent as many as 100 vessels to the area.⁵⁸ According to Hanoi, a China Coast Guard vessel had reportedly attacked a Vietnamese fishing boat, beaten its crew, and seized its catch and equipment. Several Vietnamese ships were rammed and hit by water cannons some seven nautical miles from the rig. Once again, talks occurred in Beijing between China's assistant foreign minister and Vietnam's deputy foreign minister.⁵⁹

On May 17, Vietnam's minister of public security discussed safety concerns with his Chinese counterpart. As this phone call occurred, the Vietnam Fisheries Surveillance Force reported that China's protective fleet around the HYSY 981 had added 27 new ships in recent days, including four PLA Navy vessels. This brought the total Chinese presence to around 130 ships. Hanoi claimed it had only five fisheries vessels deployed near the rig. One Vietnamese officer noted the disparity between the 2,000-ton China Coast Guard vessels and 450-ton Vietnamese ships, which as a result were more likely to sink during a collision. That day, a Chinese vessel allegedly rammed a Vietnamese fishing boat 31 nautical miles from Triton Island.⁶⁰

On May 18, thousands of Vietnamese police flooded major cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to crack down on anti-China protests. Vietnam's efforts to calm fears of unrest were unsuccessful, however. China arranged three chartered flights to take over 300 Chinese nationals, including many of those injured in the riots, from Ha Tinh Province to the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu. Elsewhere, ferries helped to evacuate 4,000 Chinese citizens. Beijing announced that it had increased its travel warning for Vietnam and suspended some bilateral exchanges. Widespread cancellations and suspensions of air travel followed.⁶¹

At sea, Vietnamese claimed that hundreds of Chinese fishing boats arrived at the site of the rig. These vessels did not engage in commercial fishing but instead arranged themselves seven nm from the oil rig with their bows facing away, so as to protect the HYSY 981. China Coast Guard vessels also rammed, fired water cannons at, and surrounded outnumbered Vietnam Coast Guard

58. "Spotlight: Vietnam's Anti-China Violence Damages Ties, Economy," Xinhua, May 16, 2014; "China, Vietnam Hold Talks on Recent Anti-China Violence," Xinhua, May 17, 2014; "China Once Again Urges Vietnam to Immediately Stop Disruptions of Chinese Company's Operation," Xinhua, May 16, 2015; "Vietnam Demands Reply from China over Illegal Oil Rig," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 16, 2014.

59. The foreign ministry reported this patrol vessel to be FLEC 306, but this pennant number does not seem to exist. Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 5, 2014); "China Beefs up Rig Fleet, Continues Attacks on Vietnamese Ships," *Thanh Nien News*, May 17, 2014.

60. "Security Minister Holds Phone Talks with Chinese Counterpart," *VGP News*, May 17, 2014; Vietnamese MFA, "Contents of the International Press Conference" (June 5, 2014); "China Beefs up Rig Fleet," *Thanh Nien News*.

61. "Vietnam Stops Anti-China Protests after Riots, China Evacuates Workers," Reuters, May 18, 2014; Hong Lei, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on May 15, 2014" (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 15, 2014); "China Travel to Vietnam Plummets amid South China Sea Standoff," *Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2014.

vessels. Hanoi reported that the number of Chinese government ships had risen to 136.⁶² Several reports and pictures surfaced of Chinese troops and war materiel moving toward the Vietnamese border in China's Guangxi Province. Rumors circled that the alert level of neighboring Yunnan had been raised to combat readiness.⁶³

On May 19, Chinese state councilor and defense minister Chang Wanquan met with Vietnamese defense minister Phung Quang Thanh at the ASEAN-China Defense Ministers' Meeting, but no breakthrough was reached. A Chinese spokesperson urged ASEAN to "remain neutral [and] not intervene in the dispute."⁶⁴ Yet pressure continued to rise as several Chinese military aircraft were seen near the HYSY 981. A JH-7 fighter-bomber made four passes 3,000 feet above Vietnamese ships and a Chinese maritime patrol aircraft twice flew at 800 feet over another ship. China Coast Guard vessels continued to keep Vietnamese ships at least six nm away from the oil rig.⁶⁵

On May 21, Vietnamese prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Philippine president Benigno Aquino began a two-day summit in Manila to discuss Chinese maritime behavior. The leaders discussed the possibility of taking international legal action against Beijing.⁶⁶ Vietnam's foreign minister also called U.S. secretary of state John Kerry to review recent developments. That same day, Assistant Secretary Russel announced that the United States would commit \$18 million in foreign military financing to the Vietnam Coast Guard. Vietnam's national assembly also passed a resolution condemning China's action.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Xi Jinping spoke at the Fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia and repeated China's disapproval of "military alliances targeted at a third party." Hanoi tried to pacify China by clarifying that Vietnam was not seeking "any military alliance against another country."⁶⁸

Vietnamese diplomats submitted a report on China's activities to the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and other international organizations on May 22. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe expressed his support for Vietnam's position and announced that Tokyo would accelerate its plan to provide Hanoi maritime patrol vessels. The United States also stated that it would support Vietnam if Hanoi elected to pursue "arbitration or other international mechanisms."⁶⁹ When asked about possible legal action, a Chinese spokesperson asserted that "there exists no dispute" over

62. "China Deploys Myriad Fishing Boats to Guard Illegal Rig in Vietnam's Waters," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 19, 2014.

63. Joshua Philipp, "Chinese Military Said to Be Massing near the Vietnam Border (+Photos)," *Epoch Times*, May 18, 2014; "PLA Troops Spotted near China-Vietnam Border," *Want China Times*, May 18, 2014.

64. "Chinese State Councilor Meets Vietnamese Defense Minister in Myanmar," Xinhua, May 20, 2014; "China Demands ASEAN Stay out of Vietnam Dispute," *Inquirer Global Nation*, May 19, 2014.

65. "China Military Planes Support Illegal Oil Rig in Vietnam's Waters," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 20, 2014.

66. Manuel Mogato and John Ruwitch, "Vietnam, Philippines Jointly Denounce China's Maritime Moves," Reuters, May 21, 2014; "Vietnam Threatens Legal Action against China," *Al Jazeera America*, May 21, 2014.

67. "U.S. Hails Vietnam's Goodwill, Criticizing China's Provocation over Sea Dispute," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2014; "Vietnam Legislature Denounces China's Oil Rig Deployment as Sovereignty Infringement," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2014.

68. Vietnamese MFA, "Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung Answers to Associated Press on 21 May" (press conference, MFA, Hanoi, May 21, 2014); Xi Jinping, "State by H. E. Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China" (speech, Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, May 21, 2014).

69. "Vietnam Reports China's Violation of Sovereignty to United Nations," *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2014; "Excerpts from WSJ Interview with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2014; "Japan, Vietnam Blame China for

the Paracels and accused Vietnam of giving “tacit permission” to anti-China riots. This followed an announcement from a large Chinese metallurgical and construction company that a riot at the Ha Tinh Steel Plant in Vietnam had killed four Chinese workers and injured 126.⁷⁰

The same day, media reported for the first time that Chinese vessels were deployed in three or more concentric circles. The innermost circle centered on two Chinese frigates docked close to the oil rig. The middle circle included other PLA Navy ships. The outermost circle was made up of dozens of China Marine Surveillance, Fisheries Law Enforcement Command, and China Coast Guard vessels. As for Vietnam, its coast guard and fisheries ships were deployed “in the shape of the blades of a fan, with five teams around the rig.” The teams were stationed half a nautical mile apart, allowing them to cover a wide area while still retaining the ability to respond quickly should Chinese vessels confront any of the teams. During the night, Vietnamese ships shifted position every couple hours to thwart ambushes.⁷¹ The commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Locklear, told reporters on May 23 that he had “serious concerns” about the risk of a miscalculation escalating into armed conflict. The head of the Vietnamese foreign ministry’s legal department advised, “Using legal measures is better than armed conflict.”⁷²

The Vietnam Fisheries Surveillance Force observed on May 25 that the HYSY 981 had raised its drilling equipment and begun to move. The rig settled at a new location the following day, only 100 yards north of its original site. Hanoi assessed that this repositioning was “due to technical reasons.” Vietnamese officers also reported that China Coast Guard vessels were still enforcing their defensive perimeter up to 12 nm from the rig. Beijing also deployed roughly 50 large “iron-covered” fishing vessels spaced a few dozen yards apart, thereby forming a mile-long “fence” between the oil rig and Vietnamese ships.⁷³

Forty Chinese fishing vessels reportedly surrounded a small group of Vietnamese fishing boats 17 nm southwest of HYSY 981 on May 26. One boat apparently rammed and sank a Vietnamese fishing vessel. The 10 crewmembers were rescued by other Vietnamese fishermen present. Beijing’s account of the sinking put the blame squarely on Hanoi. The Chinese foreign ministry argued that the Vietnamese boat had capsized after it purposely rammed a Chinese vessel. Beijing also asserted that “the direct reason” for this and other incidents was Vietnam’s continued bid to

Maritime Tensions,” *Japan Times*, May 22, 2014; “White House Supports Legal Action to Resolve China, Vietnam Dispute,” Reuters, May 22, 2014.

70. Hong Lei, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Regular Press Conference on May 22, 2014” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 22, 2014); “China’s MCC Says Four Staff Killed in Vietnam Unrest, Most Employees Evacuated,” Reuters, May 20, 2014.

71. “Days of Witnessing China’s Aggressive Games in East Vietnam Sea,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2014.

72. Jim Gomez, “U.S. Commander Warns about China-Vietnam Standoff,” *Yahoo! News*, May 23, 2014; Sui-Lee Wee and Manuel Mogato, “China Warns Japan, Philippines Accuses China in Maritime Spat,” Reuters, May 23, 2014.

73. “Chinese Ship Rams, Sinks Vietnamese Fishing Boat in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 26, 2014; “China Moves Illegal Oil Rig 100 Meters North in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 26, 2014; “China Might Have Moved Illegal Oil Rig in Vietnam’s Waters: Report,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 26, 2014.

approach and disrupt the operation of the oil rig. Meanwhile, a Fisheries Surveillance Force vessel was allegedly surrounded and attacked by 10 Chinese vessels.⁷⁴

Phase IV: Rig Towed East to New Drilling Site

On May 27, two Chinese tugboats pulled the HYSY 981 to a new location 23 nautical miles to the northeast. The China Maritime Safety Administration announced that the second phase of oil and gas exploration had commenced. According to the notice, the rig would remain at its new position from May 27 to August 15. China reiterated its commitment to forbid foreign vessels from entering a three-nm radius around the platform.⁷⁵ A spokesperson in Beijing stated that this was “part of the overall plan for . . . the drilling operation,” and the second phase of the exploration was taking place at the second location “as planned . . . within the indisputable coastal waters of China.” A press release seemed to suggest both locations were 17 nm from Triton Island, “completely within China’s territorial waters,” and a later position paper repeated this measurement as well.⁷⁶ Vietnamese media, on the other hand, described the new location as 25 nm away.⁷⁷ In any case, under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea the rig was well beyond the feature’s 12-nm territorial sea.

Vietnamese agencies reported that China still maintained about 120 vessels at this new location, including 36 China Coast Guard vessels, 14 “freighters,” and 17 PLA Navy ships. Beijing continued to arrange the ships in defensive rings and maintain a high tempo of operations. After the rig’s movement, Hanoi reiterated its opposition on China’s activities, saying the platform was violating Vietnamese sovereign rights. Vietnam then summoned a representative from the Chinese embassy to deliver another note verbale.⁷⁸

Chinese state councilor Yang Jiechi visited Vietnam on June 18 for the highest-level direct talks since China’s movement of the HYSY 981. State Councilor Yang held direct talks on Chinese drilling activities with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh, and General Secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong. The two sides pressed their respective positions in “candid and constructive” discussions, but both sides publicly emphasized the importance of their overall relationship and resolution of the dispute through bilateral negotiations and joint development. State Councilor Yang also made a point of stating that both countries

74. Qin Gang, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang’s Regular Press Conference on May 27, 2014” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, May 27, 2014); “Vietnamese Boat Capsized in S China Sea, Crew Saved,” Xinhua, May 27, 2014; Vietnamese MFA, “Contents of the International Press Conference” (June 5, 2014); “Chinese Ship Rams, Sinks Vietnamese Fishing Boat,” *Tuoi Tre News*; “China Moves Illegal Oil Rig 100 Meters,” *Tuoi Tre News*.

75. Screenshots of the original MSA navigation notice 14041 are preserved on various Chinese blogs and forums: <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/3167679081?pid=53818077861#53818077861>; “China Moves Illegal Oil Rig to New Area, Still in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 27, 2014.

76. Qin Gang, “Regular Press Conference on May 27, 2014”; “Vietnamese Boat Capsized in S China Sea,” Xinhua; “COSL’s Oil Exploration Enters Second Phase,” Xinhua, May 27, 2014; PRC MFA, “The Operation of the HYSY-981 Drilling Rig: Vietnam’s Provocation and China’s Position,” June 9, 2014.

77. “Vietnamese Vessels Approaching Chinese Oil Rig at New Location,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 28, 2014; “Illegal Chinese Rig Moves 23 Nautical Miles in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, May 28, 2014.

78. *Ibid.*

should “ward off [external] interferences.” Chinese state media hailed the summit as a success, with Xinhua commenting that the two sides had agreed to “properly handle the sensitive issues in bilateral ties.”⁷⁹

At the time of the meeting, China reportedly deployed roughly 40 China Coast Guard vessels, 15 transports, 20 tugboats, 35 iron-clad fishing ships, and 5 PLA Navy ships. However, Vietnamese authorities observed that 18 vessels had departed, and that the remaining force was less active. The ships formed a tight “fantail shape” around the rig with little distance between the ships, as opposed to the dispersed formation that had prevailed previously. In addition, the HYSY 981 drilling equipment was visibly retracted and Chinese ships conducted fewer rammings and water cannon attacks.⁸⁰

Phase V: Withdraws a Month Early

On July 15, the China National Petroleum Corporation announced that the HYSY 981’s exploratory activities had been completed. According to the statement, the operation had found “signs of oil and gas” that required comprehensive assessment before any extraction testing could be done. As a result of preliminary testing, the HYSY 981 was being relocated near Hainan Island. Despite the fact that Beijing had stated on multiple occasions that the oil rig would depart on August 15, China claimed that the operation’s conclusion had proceeded “as scheduled.”⁸¹ In a press conference, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson stated that the relocation of the rig “was in accordance with relevant company’s plan of operation at sea” and had “nothing to do with any external factor.”⁸²

Vietnamese officials reported that all of the rig’s escort vessels accompanied the HYSY 981 to southern Hainan. Responding to this withdrawal, a Vietnamese spokesperson insisted that China not send any oil rig to Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone and continental shelf again. Prime Minister Dung reiterated that demand and noted that it applied not only to Vietnam but also for all countries in Southeast Asia. Dung hailed Vietnam’s success and thanked the international community for its support during the standoff.⁸³

79. See, for example, “Top Chinese Diplomat Yang Jiechi Visits Vietnam over Oil Rig,” *Tuoi Tre News*, June 18, 2014; “Vietnam PM Demands Rig Withdrawal in Meeting with Top Chinese Diplomat,” *Tuoi Tre News*, June 19, 2014; China, Vietnam Agree to Properly Handle Sensitive Bilateral Issues,” Xinhua, June 18, 2014; “China, Vietnam Should Ward off Interferences, Strengthen Cooperation: Chinese State Councilor,” Xinhua, June 19, 2014.

80. “Chinese Vessels Less Active, Re-Arranged near Illegal Rig in Vietnam Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, June 19, 2014.

81. “CNPC Ends Drilling off Xisha Islands,” Xinhua, July 16, 2014; “Chinese FM Confirms Drilling off Xisha Completed,” Xinhua, July 16, 2014; “Rig Removal in Accordance with Original Plan,” *Global Times*, July 17, 2014.

82. Hong Lei, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Remarks on the Completion of the Operation in Waters to the South of China’s Zhongjian Island” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, July 16, 2014); Hong Lei, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Further Remarks Concerning the Withdrawal of the HYSY 981 Drilling Rig” (press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, July 16, 2014).

83. “China Moves Illegal Oil Rig out of Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre News*, July 16, 2014; “MoFA Comments on China’s Oil Rig Move,” *VGP News*, July 16, 2014; “Vietnamese Premier Demands China Not Repeat Sovereignty Violations after Rig Moving,” *Tuoi Tre News*, July 16, 2014.

The HYSY 981 has returned to northwestern portion of the South China Sea several times since 2014. However, on none of these occasions did it cross over to the Vietnamese side of the assumed median line between the two countries (excluding the Paracel Islands). In June 2015, the oil rig carried out drilling operations 75 nautical miles south of Hainan Island. It returned again in January 2016 to an area 25 miles on the Chinese side of the median line, and again in April 2016 to a similar location.⁸⁴

Conclusions

First, China knowingly took a risk in putting the oil rig into disputed waters. As a result, Chinese leaders were prepared to respond rapidly if Vietnamese forces intercepted the rig. This is evident in the speed with which a large Chinese flotilla arrived on the scene after Vietnamese ships began to challenge the rig and its escorts. Although Chinese leaders must have been surprised by the ferocity of the Vietnamese response, they were still prepared to send and maintain at sea a large fleet of civilian and government vessels.

Second, Vietnam accepted significant risk in pushing back so forcefully against the oil rig's operations in disputed waters. Many Vietnamese ships sustained severe damage in the confrontation, yet Hanoi continued to contest control of the area even though Chinese ships were larger, better equipped, and more numerous. The Vietnamese ability to use motherships to supply and repair vessels at sea likely aided the government's ability to sustain its challenge to the Chinese operations. Thus, the fact that the standoff continued for several months demonstrates that leaders in both countries were willing to accept risk.

Third, China's use of concentric circles of vessels protecting the oil rig is a classic example of China's general approach to maritime incidents. Beijing takes calculated risks and attempts to accomplish its goals with the minimum use of force possible. By putting its fishing vessels on the perimeter, civilian government vessels in the middle, and military ships in the center, China decreased the likelihood of conflict while attempting to accomplish its objectives and deter escalation. After all, any vessel entering the area near the oil rig was most likely to turn away after a clash with a fishing vessel, which would carry less risk to Beijing than an encounter with a Chinese government vessel. However, when tested continually over time, China was still required to use force, which may be one reason that the oil rig's operations ended earlier than planned.

Finally, unlike many other cases of maritime coercion, Beijing appears to have backed down. Although Beijing escalated repeatedly and had a larger and more capable force than Hanoi, Vietnam's persistence and risk acceptance appear to have convinced China to withdraw the oil rig early. Leaders in China have contested this conclusion, but it is clear that the oil rig was initially planned to stay through mid-August and that its withdrawal was a divergence from the initial plan.

84. "China Moves Controversial Oil Rig back towards Vietnam Coast," Reuters, June 26, 2015; Mike Ives, "Vietnam Objects to Chinese Oil Rig in Disputed Waters," *New York Times*, January 20, 2016; Shannon Tiezzi, "Vietnam to China: Move Your Oil Rig out of the South China Sea," *Diplomat*, April 9, 2016.