

# South China Sea Dispute

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# Why in News

Recently, **China warned off a USA warship** sailing near contested **Paracel islands in the South China Sea (SCS).** 

# **Key Points**

#### About

- China's Claim:
  - **China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea**, including the Paracel Islands.

However, Taiwan, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam also claim parts of the region, **believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits.** 

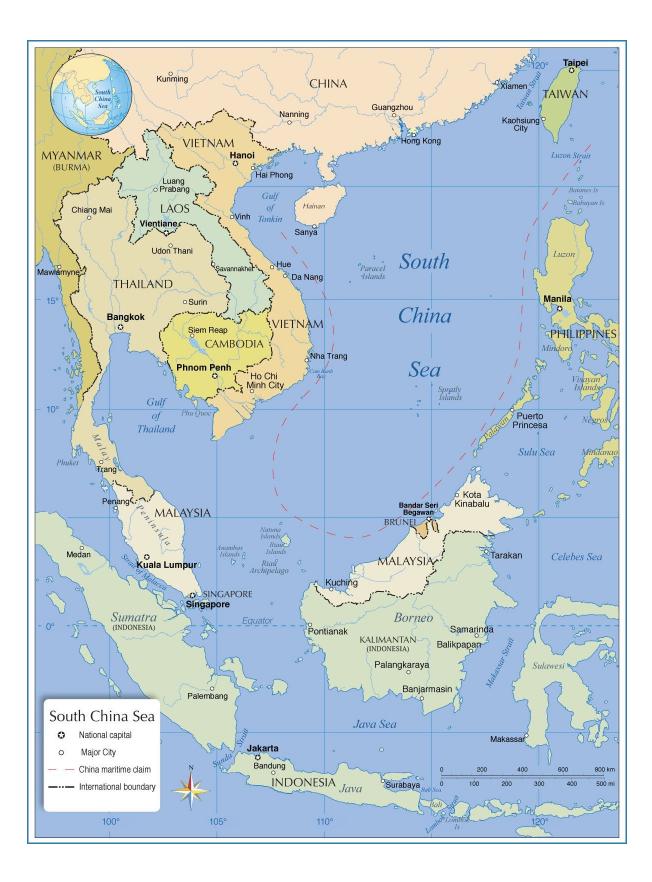
- It has alleged that the USA warship broke into China's *Xisha* (Paracel) island's territorial waters without the permission of the Chinese government and accused USA for "seriously violating China's sovereignty" and "harming regional peace."
- USA's Stand:
  - The USA has argued that such exercises are in line with international law and help **defend the right of passage** through the region amid competing claims by China and other governments.
  - It is in sync with the USA's continuous efforts to counter China's assertion in SCS. Recently the USA Navy sent an aircraft carrier group into the South China Sea.

- South China Sea
  - **Location:** South China Sea is **an arm of western Pacific Ocean** in Southeast Asia. It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo.

It is **connected by Taiwan Strait** with the East China Sea and by **Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.** 

- **Bordering states & territories (clockwise from north):** the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.
- **Strategic Importance:** This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the **connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Strait of Malacca).**

According to the <u>United Nations Conference on Trade And</u> <u>Development (UNCTAD)</u> one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.



# **Reasons For Dispute in the South China Sea:**

- Contesting Claims Over Islands:
  - **The Paracel Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.
  - **The Spratly Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei and Philippines.
  - **The Scarborough Shoal** is claimed by Philippines, China and Taiwan.
- China's Assertion:
  - Since 2010, China has been converting uninhabited islets into artificial islets to bring it under <u>UNCLOS</u> (examples would include Haven Reef, Johnson South Reef and Fiery Cross Reef).
  - China has been changing the size and structure of the reefs by modifying their physical land features. It has also established airstrips on Parcel and Spratly.
  - Chinese fishing fleets are engaged in paramilitary work on behalf of the state rather than the commercial enterprise of fishing.
  - The US is very critical of this building of artificial islands and terms these actions of China as building a **'great wall of sand'**.
- Other Issues:
  - Undefined geographic scope of the South China Sea.
  - **Disagreement over dispute settlement** mechanisms.
  - Undefined legal status of the **Code of Conduct (COC)** add to it.
  - The different histories of distant, largely uninhabited archipelagos of the sea make the matter more complicated and multifaceted.



# India's Stand:

- India has maintained that it is not a party to the SCS dispute and its presence in the SCS is not to contain China but to **secure its own economic interests**, **especially that of its energy security needs.**
- However, China's increasing ability to decide and expand its role in the South China Sea has compelled India to reevaluate its approach on the issue.
- As a key element of the <u>Act East Policy</u>, India has started **internationalizing disputes** in the **Indo-Pacific region** to oppose China's threatening tactics in SCS.
- Further, India is using its Buddhist legacy to make a strong bond with the Southeast Asian region.
- India has also deployed its navy with Vietnam in the South China **Sea for protection of sea lanes of communication (SLOC),** denying China any space for assertion.
- Also, India is part of **Quad initiative** (India, US, Japan, Australia) and lynchpin of Indo-Pacific narrative. These initiatives are viewed as a containment strategy by China.

#### Source:TH