

**THE CHINA-PHILIPPINE STAND-OFF
IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

Katherine TSENG Hui-Yi

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Executive Summary

1. On 10 April 2012, the Philippine warship, Gregorio del Pilar, caught eight Chinese fishing boats poaching in Scarborough Shoal, 124 nautical miles to the west of the island of Luzon in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. Forbidden marine resources were found in the Chinese vessels.
2. The arrival of two Chinese marine surveillance ships prevented an arrest of the Chinese crews, but the two sides were locked in a stand-off ever since. While calling for diplomatic resolutions, both China and the Philippines issued hard-line statements and remain intransigent in their stance.
3. Amid the confrontation, the US and the Philippines held a pre-scheduled joint military drill from 16 to 27 April, a gesture deemed unwelcome at a time of tension.
4. The closer military cooperation between the US and the Philippines was however met with vigorous protests in Manila when announced in early March. Philippine scholars opine that sincere talks with China via diplomatic channels are more efficacious than involving Washington in the current stalemate.
5. A series of incidents since 2009 involving China, Vietnam and the Philippines have unsettled peace and stability in the region. Chinese ambiguous territorial claims and its refusal to clarify them are a big concern to other claimants in the South China Sea (SCS) dispute.
6. However, Chinese position seems to have undergone an oblique change, by first differentiating disputes over territorial claims to contested regions and then those over marine rights. Beijing was said to have briefed their foreign affairs personnel, albeit behind closed doors, that neither China, nor other claimants, hold sovereignty rights over the entirety of the SCS.

7. However, the behavior of Chinese civilian maritime law enforcement agencies indicates a divergence in interpretation between central and local governments. This could be attributed to the existence of numerous maritime enforcement agencies at the local level as well as the fragmented management of Chinese marine policy in Beijing.
8. This also reflects the failure of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conveying the stance of the central government to various governmental departments, local governments, relevant military players, and the international community.
9. US role in East Asia is still unclear. The US appears to be cautious steering between appeasing its regional allies and assuring China of US neutrality in these disputes. Washington seems unwilling to be involved in regional tensions, in particular when it comes at the price of undermining the hard-won trust between Beijing and Washington.
10. China's flawed governmental structures in terms of marine policy management and foreign policy making need to be addressed urgently before they jeopardize regional peace and stability, and the interests of the Chinese people and the international community.