

**Featured *MSP Perspectives*:****Vietnam's Shift from a Sea Denial Strategy in the South China Sea**

— p. 4

By Collin Koh

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In March 1988, the Vietnamese was dealt a naval defeat by China in the disputed Spratly Islands. Hence, it has been taken for granted – almost by conventional wisdom – that in view of the naval asymmetry between the Chinese and Vietnamese, Hanoi must adhere to a sea denial strategy, also necessary since Vietnam continues to prioritize its socioeconomic development conceived under the “Doi Moi” (Renovation) thinking since the early 1990s.

Yet it would be misleading to view the Vietnamese as fatalistic – they have long recognized the limitations of a traditional sea denial approach and thus sought to enhance their strategy to forestall Chinese military aggression in the South China Sea.

As Hanoi’s navy received its sixth and final Russian-built *Kilo* class diesel-electric submarine and completed submarine squadron, a sea denial-centered Vietnamese naval strategy would plausibly give way to a more robust, counter-force role. Instead of torpedoes and mines, which are traditionally weapons for sea denial, Vietnam’s *Kilo* boats also possess Russian-made Klub-S sea-launched land attack cruise missiles (SLCMs) that can hit targets out to 300 kilometers.

Such a counter-force role would still fit well within Hanoi’s strategically defensive deterrent strategy. The Vietnamese may hope to forestall Chinese aggression by raising the costs for Beijing – the potential destruction wreaked upon its forward-deployed naval forces in Sanya being one such instance.

If anything, the Russian feat during its campaign in Syria in late 2015 demonstrated that it is feasible for small naval forces to conduct limited, expeditionary force projection. The *Kilo* boat *Rostov-on-Don* became the first conventionally-powered submarine to launch SLCMs in deep, inland

penetration strikes. Hanoi apparently caught on and became inspired by Moscow’s feat.

Towards this goal, Hanoi would enhance the ability to raise the costs of Beijing’s aggression, beyond those submarines it has acquired. Referring to the *Kilos*, back in September 2014 [a military official in Hanoi remarked that](#) “they are not our sole weapon, but part of a number of weapons we are developing to better protect our sovereignty.”

Therefore, Vietnam has made further moves to put into effect a more robust counter-intervention strategy that signals a departure from a traditional sea denial approach. For example, its marines [trained for “island recapture”](#) in the Spratlys – a prospect which was unthinkable back in 1988. In May 2016, Vietnam was [reportedly negotiating](#) with Russia the purchase of a third pair of *Gepard* 3.9-class light guidedmissile frigates. What is so special about this purchase is that Hanoi [wants](#) these new ships to be armed with the Klub SLCMs. One recalls that the Russian Navy’s Caspian Flotilla corvettes – in the same size category as the *Gepard* 3.9s – along with the submarine *Rostov-on-Don* had proven that small surface warships are capable of launching SLCM attacks.

The Vietnamese may not be oblivious to the scenario that any foreseeable war in the South China Sea with Beijing would result in a preordained strategic victory for the latter. But Hanoi has gradually shifted away from a traditional sea denial strategy to one that would raise the cost for Chinese aggression. The completion of its submarine squadron in 2017 is just the first major step towards this direction.

*This is an abridged version of the article published in The National Interest (click [here](#)).*



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UNITED STATES | 19 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### **U.S. carrier group patrols in tense South China Sea**

A United States aircraft carrier strike group has begun patrols in the South China Sea amid growing tension with China over control of the disputed waterway and concerns it could become a flashpoint under the new U.S. administration.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA | 2 FEBRUARY | CHOSUN ILBO

### **Navy Puts Anti-Submarine Choppers into Service**

The Navy on Wednesday put four AgustaWestland AW159 Wildcat helicopters into service.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-SRI LANKA | 4 FEBRUARY | COLOMBO PAGE

### **No Chinese military activity at Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, envoy assures**

Allaying India's fears, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to China Dr. Karunasena Kodituwakku has assured that Chinese military activity will not be allowed at the Hambantota Port following the handover of 80 percent stakes of the strategic port to a Chinese firm.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-UNITED STATES | 4 FEBRUARY | CNN

### **Mattis: US will defend Japanese islands claimed by China**

US Defense Secretary James Mattis on Saturday reaffirmed Washington's commitment to defending Japan, including a group of disputed islands which have been claimed by China.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA-UNITED STATES | 6 FEBRUARY | THE KOREA HERALD

### **US offered to deploy stealth destroyer in S. Korea: Seoul**

The US has proposed deploying its largest stealthy destroyer in South Korea as the allies are exploring ways to better deter North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats, Seoul's Defense Ministry said Monday.

[Full Report](#)

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INDONESIA | 7 FEBRUARY | NAVAL TECHNOLOGY

### **DSNS delivers first SIGMA 10514 PKR to Indonesian MoD**

Netherlands-based shipyard Damen Schelde Naval Shipbuilding (DSNS) has delivered the first SIGMA 10514 Perusak Kawal Rudal (PKR) guided-missile frigate to the Indonesian Ministry of Defence (MoD).

[Full Report](#)

INDIA-INDONESIA | 9 FEBRUARY | THE HINDU

### **India to impart submarine training to Indonesia**

India has agreed to impart submarine training to Indonesia as part of a bilateral effort to diversify defence cooperation.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 12 FEBRUARY | THE MANILA TIMES

### **No reclamation at Panatag – DFA**

THE Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said no reclamation activities have been seen the disputed Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal), refuting the claim of Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

[Full Report](#)



SOUTH KOREA | 15 FEBRUARY | KBS WORLD

### **S. Korean Military Dispatch Special Forces Unit to 5 Northwest Islands**

The South Korean military has dispatched a special Marine task force unit to the five Northwest islands near the inter-Korean maritime border amid heightened inter-Korean tension, following the North's latest missile provocation.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 16 FEBRUARY | CHINA DAILY

### **Seaplane undergoing final tests**

The world's largest amphibious aircraft, the AG-600, will carry out its debut flight in the first half of the year

and is due to begin delivery in 2021, its chief designer said.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 17 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### **EXCLUSIVE-Japan to speed up frigate build to reinforce East China Sea - sources**

Japan plans to accelerate a warship building programme to make two frigates a year to patrol the fringes of the East China Sea, where it disputes island ownership with China, three people with knowledge of the plan said.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 21 FEBRUARY | DEFENSE NEWS

### **China displays trimaran frigate design**

Navies have flirted with exotic hull forms for decades, and the US Navy is producing Independence-class littoral combat ships with a wave-piercing trimaran hull form.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-RUSSIA | 23 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### **Japan protests Russian military buildup plan in decades-old islands dispute**

Japan has protested to Russia over its plan to boost troop strength on disputed islands, Japan's top government spokesman said on Thursday, the latest move in a territorial row that has overshadowed ties since World War Two.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 24 FEBRUARY | NAVY TIMES

### **A 308-ship Navy to cost \$566 billion, CBO estimates**

A U.S. Navy plan to build a 308 ship fleet will cost a whopping \$566 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 28 FEBRUARY | USNI NEWS

### **Iron Fist 2017: Japan Under Time Crunch to Establish New Amphibious Unit**

While rough seas and queasy stomachs tested some 350 Japanese soldiers and command staffs who took to sea aboard Navy ships for exercise Iron Fist, time might be their greatest obstacle.

[Full Report](#)



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CHINA | 14 FEBRUARY | XINHUA

### China mulls revision of maritime safety law

China is considering revisions to the 1984 Maritime Traffic Safety Law to prioritize searches for survivors over searches for property.

[Full Report](#)

NEW ZEALAND | 8 FEBRUARY | SCOOP.CO.NZ

### NZDF To Help Counter Piracy And Trafficking in Middle East

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is sending a 55-member contingent and an Air Force P-3K2 Orion surveillance aircraft to the Middle East to join an international partnership against piracy and people and drug trafficking.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-THE PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES | 8 FEBRUARY | MANILA BULLETIN

### Philippines seeks US, China help to combat sea pirates

The Philippines is seeking US and Chinese help to guard a major sea lane as Islamic militants shift attacks to international shipping, officials said Wednesday.

[Full Report](#)

BANGLADESH-MYANMAR | 8 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### Myanmar says it killed Bangladeshi fisherman in self-defence

Bangladesh A Myanmar patrol boat opened fire on Bangladeshi fishermen, killing one, because it feared it was under attack, Myanmar state media said on Wednesday, in a report on the latest violence on the countries' troubled border.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-UNITED STATES | 10 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### U.S., China military planes come inadvertently close over South China Sea

A U.S. Navy P-3 plane and a Chinese military aircraft came close to each other over the South China Sea in an incident the Navy believes was inadvertent, a U.S. official told Reuters on Thursday.

[Full Report](#)

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INDONESIA-SINGAPORE | 10 FEBRUARY | TODAY

### **Indonesia, Singapore bring maritime treaty into force**

Indonesia and Singapore have brought into force a landmark maritime boundary treaty, and jointly announced that the two nations would celebrate the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations this year.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 11 FEBRUARY | THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Maritime security drill held off Goa coastline**

In a bid to foster regional bilateral ties and enhance maritime security cooperation, the Indian Coast Guard held anti-piracy and safety exercises off the coast of Goa.

[Full Report](#)

PAKISTAN | 12 FEBRUARY | DAWN

### **Anti-terror skills demonstrated during Aman-2017 exercise**

An impressive demonstration of counterterrorism skills along with a performance of military bands was the highlight of Pakistan Navy's multinational exercise Aman-2017 at Manora on Saturday.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA | 14 FEBRUARY | YONHAP

### **S. Korean naval unit to join EU counter-piracy operation next month**

South Korea's Cheonghae Unit will take part in a counter-piracy military operation led by the European Union (EU) for the first time next month, the defense ministry said Tuesday.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-THE PHILIPPINES | 15 FEBRUARY | MANILA STANDARD

### **Japan offers aid vs piracy**

THE Japanese government has offered to help the Philippine government curb transnational crimes, particularly piracy and kidnapping at sea.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 19 FEBRUARY | THE STAR ONLINE

### **Pirate busters set sights on Sabah's east coast for terror groups**

Malaysia's pirate busters are now setting their sights on the east coast of Sabah and its notorious kidnap-for-ransom terror groups.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES | 21 FEBRUARY | THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### **Vietnamese killed, 6 seized in Tawi-Tawi pirate attack**

Gunmen attacked a Vietnamese cargo vessel in the waters off Tawi-Tawi, killing a crewmember and seizing six others on Sunday night.

[Full Report](#)

ASEAN | 21 FEBRUARY | THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### **ASEAN ministers call for continuous South China Sea dialogue**

Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) noted the importance of sustaining the momentum of dialogue in easing the tensions in the disputed South China Sea, the Philippines' top diplomat said on Tuesday.

[Full Report](#)



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JAPAN-THE PHILIPPINES | 23 FEBRUARY | UPDATE PHILIPPINES

### **2 Japanese aircraft to be delivered to Philippine Navy next month**

The Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) will deliver two of the five leased turbo-prop TC-90 aircraft to the Philippine Navy's (PN) Sangley Point air facility on March 27.

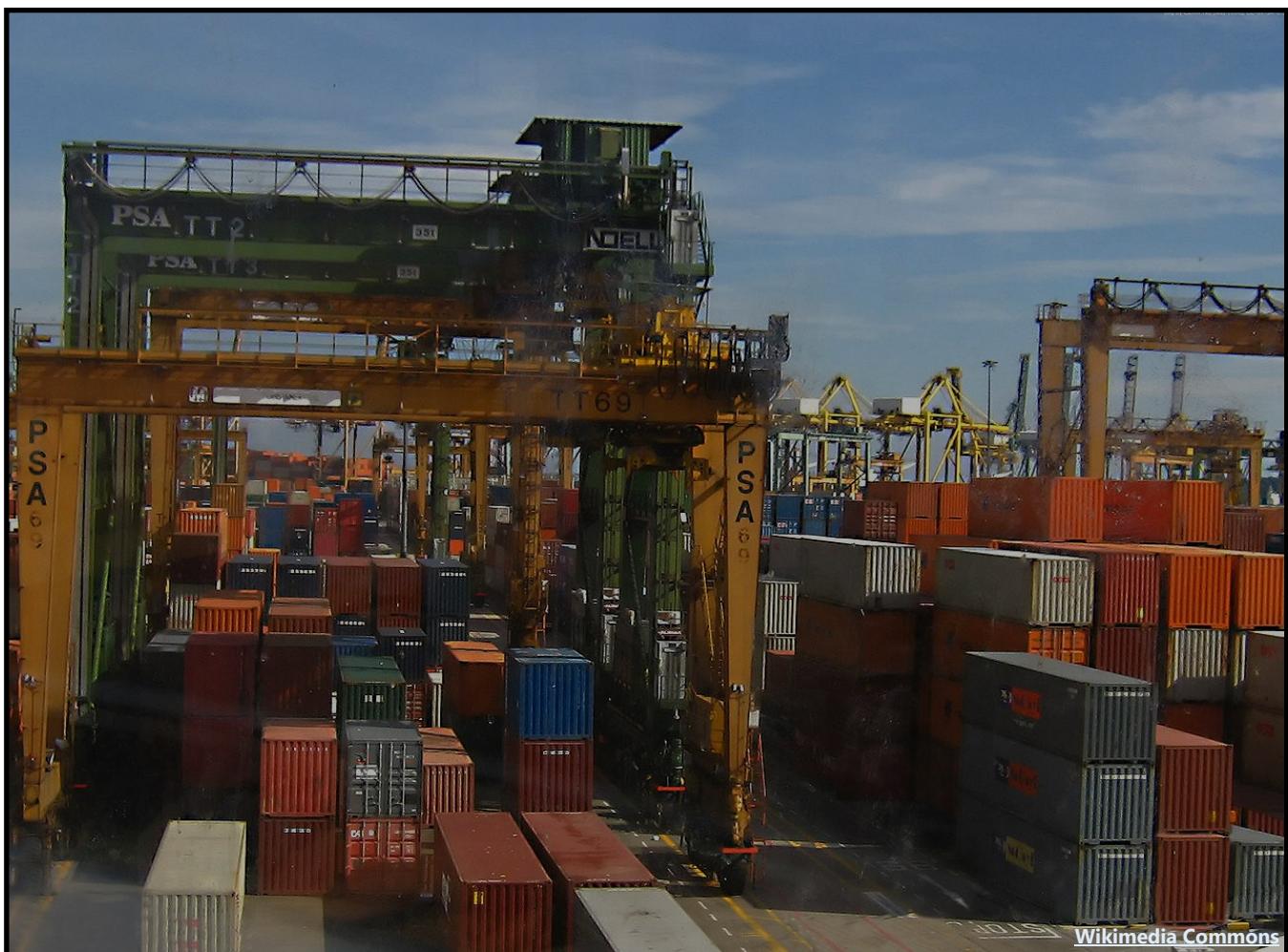
[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA | 25 FEBRUARY | THE JAKARTA POST

### **SCS plan raises eyebrows**

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's suggestion that Australia take part in joint patrols in the South China Sea has sparked concerns on the eve of his two-day visit Down Under.

[Full Report](#)



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SINGAPORE | 6 FEBRUARY | THE STRAITS TIMES

## **S'pore shipyards 'valued for expertise and track record'**

Shipyards in Singapore remain prized for their expertise in shipbuilding despite the beaten-down market.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 3 FEBRUARY | CHINA DAILY

## **Building the Belt and Road for win-win development**

People from both home and abroad have expressed keen interest in the BRF since President Xi Jinping announced it at the Davos Forum in January.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 6 FEBRUARY | LLOYD'S LOADING LIST

## **Trump adds to supply chain forecast challenge**

Container shipping analyst Drewry believes the eventual real-world impact on container trades of Trump's stated policies will be minimal.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 7 FEBRUARY | LLOYD'S LOADING LIST

## **Demand for digital ocean freight solutions soars**

Online shipping marketplace Inttra reports 16% year-on-year growth in container orders in 2016, predicting digitalization will accelerate in the years ahead.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA | 8 FEBRUARY | TEMPO

## **Gov't Expects Marine Tourism to Generate US\$4bn**

Marine tourism is expected to generate up to US\$4 billion by 2019, four times higher than its current contribution to overall revenue of tourism.

[Full Report](#)

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ASIA-PACIFIC | 10 FEBRUARY | BLOOMBERG

### Maersk says sanity is returning to shipping as freight rates gain

The bankruptcy of South Korea's Hanjin Shipping Co. and a consolidation in container shipping industry will pave the way for a better 2017 for the industry.

[Full Report](#)



KOREA | 15 FEBRUARY | PULSE

### Korean govt to fund \$660 million to HMM through new state shipping bank

Aiming to breed Hyundai Merchant Marine (HMM) as a globally competitive Korean flag sea carrier in lieu of bankrupt Hanjin Shipping, the government will funnel fresh funds of 750 billion won (\$656.6 million) into the shipper as early as this month.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 17 FEBRUARY | BLOOMBERG

### The shipping news suggests reflation is real

Indicators are pointing to a much brighter outlook for the global economy, suggesting that reflation has indeed replaced deflation as the next economic trend.

[Full Report](#)

VIETNAM | 22 FEBRUARY | LLOYD'S LOADING LIST

### First triple-e boxship calls Vietnam

Vietnam has received its first ultra large containership at the APM Terminals' Cai Mep International Terminal.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 23 FEBRUARY | NIKKEI

### UN ballast-water convention to take effect in September

The treaty could be costly for owners of large freighters, among others, as they will have to install

expensive equipment to filter out unwanted marine life.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 24 FEBRUARY | PLATTS

### Analysis: Singapore bunkers may face Russian challenge in 2017 after stellar growth

After posting two consecutive years of record bunker sales, Singapore might see a moderation in growth rate in 2017 amid expectations that sales from Russia could rebound following the near-completion of its refinery modernization spree.

[Full Report](#)

HONG KONG | 25 FEBRUARY | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

### Big data professionals needed, shipping leaders warn

The maritime industry is facing a severe skills shortage in analyzing and harnessing big data, which could hinder the reinvention of the struggling industry.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 27 FEBRUARY | LLOYD'S LOADING LIST

### Containership orders at all-time low

Containership orders fell to an all-time low last year and have little chance of a major revival in the next few years.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 28 FEBRUARY | REUTERS

### Asian imports of Iranian oil rise nearly 70 percent year/year in January

Imports of Iranian crude by Asia's four main buyers of the oil rose about two-thirds in January from a year ago when levels were lower as Western sanctions on Tehran had only just been lifted.

[Full Report](#)

ASIA-PACIFIC | 28 FEBRUARY | LLOYD'S LOADING LIST

### New mega-alliances adding to pressure on box hubs

The latest wave of mega-alliances and the increasing deployment of vessels in excess of 18,000 TEU capacity is likely to put downward pressure on container-handling fees while also increasing the costs and risks for hub ports in the world's largest international transshipment market, southeast Asia.

[Full Report](#)